

European Identity and Media Effects: A Quantitative Comparative Analysis

Doctoral Thesis

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To my parents, Ejaz and Farzana, for trying your best,
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Abstract

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 28 member states with more than 500 million citizens whose legitimate existence and further integration amongst others depend on if its citizens feel a sense of collective European identification. The literature on the topic suggests that exposure to media plays a vital role in making people feel such a sense of collective identification. Accordingly, in this thesis, the principal object is the analysis of direct media effect on people's sense of European identity. The main empirical question of the study is: What kind of effects the media use has on European identity?

This thesis addresses this relevant question by carrying out a theoretically grounded analysis of the relationship between European identity and the different effects of media exposure in various contexts. The study draws on the Social Identity Theory (SIT), and the findings of social psychologists' which situate European identity a concept that corresponds to an individuals' subjective assignment to a collective and his affective and evaluative attachment to this collective.

The results of the study indicate that the EU has managed to instill a sense of European identity among its citizens this feeling, however, varies across different regions of the continent. The analyses also reveal that exposure to the media positively affects European identity. Nevertheless, such an effect is dependent on people's pre-existing attitudes towards the EU and if they perceive the media to be neutral and credible. Moreover, the study also confirms the positive effects of preferring political news from both online and traditional media on European identity.

The research in this dissertation aims to further the scholarly debate on the topic while emphasizing the direct relationship between the media and European identity, an issue which has largely been overlooked in the scholarship on EU attitudes.

1. Introduction

In the last ten years, the European Union (EU) has been facing a number of difficult challenges, including the Eurozone's financial crisis, Britain's decision to leave the EU (Brexit), and the refugee crisis. In addition to these problems, the rise of populism across the EU could throw Europe into its next major existential crisis (Der Spiegel, 2018). Hence, the future of the EU is at crossroads (Mourao et al., 2015), and some observers even believe that the EU is "doomed" (Lutz & Striessnig, 2016, p. 305). The decision of British citizens to support the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the rise of populist parties in the key EU member states not only indicate a lack of Europeans' political support for the EU but also highlights the "prevalence of national identity over European and the emergence of nationalist and anti-EU feelings among citizens" (Triga & Vadratsikas, 2017, p. 4). There are numerous antecedents of people identifying less with the EU and developing Eurosceptic attitudes. Previous studies on the topic have argued that the transformation of the EU into a "supranational regime with far-reaching competences" (Fuchs, 2011, p. 27), its reputation as a major threat to national symbols (McLaren, 2006), the costs and benefits of EU membership (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007; Gabel, 1998), the predominance of national identity concerns (Carey, 2002), as well as other factors can have a negative impact on citizen's attitudes towards the EU, including their European identity.

In a study seeking to assess different probable causes that affect and explain people's political support of and attitudes towards the EU, one must take the aforementioned explanations from the previous research into account. However, this dissertation argues that in addition to this range of explanatory factors, the role of news and information provided by

traditional and new media plays a vital role in the formation and change of public opinion towards the EU (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). The author stresses the importance of media use—in the present case for news and political information—for two reasons. First, the news and information disseminated “through media becomes part of the cognitive shortcuts adopted by the citizens to understand reality, including the European actuality” (Conti & Memoli, 2016, p. 1). Second, in the case of the EU, due to a lack of direct and firsthand experiences, citizens depend heavily on the mass media to obtain information about political matters (Norris, 2000), and this dependence in turn affects their political opinion and attitudes towards the EU (Rittberger & Maier, 2008).

Hence, today there is little debate that the media use has the ability to affect individuals’ political attitudes towards the EU, the process of European integration in general (Triga & Vadratsikas, 2017), and specific EU policies in particular (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016). However, among the different political attitudes associated with the EU and European integration, the author is keen to examine one specific attitude, i.e., citizens’ sense of their collective European identity, and the ability of media to affect it – a topic that is still underrepresented in the literature.

European identity, commonly referred to as collective political identity, is one of the most prominent concepts in research about European integration and public opinion in the EU (Weber, 2014, p. 2). Over the years, research on European identity has yielded multiple definitions, but in general, the concept refers to the sense of personal identification with Europe and with the EU as the institutional embodiment of European norms, values, and beliefs (Gvozden, 2008, p. 9). The topic of European identity became important after the Maastricht treaty in 1992, which transformed the EU from an economic to a socio-political institution (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007). Hence, the EU, with its far-reaching competencies, requires a concomitant identity from Europeans to guarantee its democratic legitimization and decision-

making (Fuchs, 2011, p. 28). Additionally, scholars stress that the emergence of such a collective identity also helps in overcoming the disintegrational tendencies within the EU and makes it more cohesive (Kaina & Karolewski, 2013). Thus, European identity is now regarded as a pre-requisite to promote European integration as well as an important dimension of public political attitudes towards the EU (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011).

In the light of the discussion above, the author has argued that in addition to other factors, the use of media either for news or political information consumption has the ability to affect EU-related political attitudes including collective European identity. Consequently, it seems logical to assume that media use affects European identity. In fact, previous studies have confirmed this notion by highlighting the crucial role of media regarding collective European identity (Hillje, 2013; Silke, 2009; Triga & Vadratsikas, 2017). However, research on what this role is specifically and what kinds of effects media might have on European identity remains limited (Conti & Memoli, 2016). It is even fair to say that until little more than a decade ago, few efforts had been made to investigate the effects of media on political attitudes toward the EU (Staehelin, 2016), and even fewer studies specifically explored the relationship between media and European identity (for exceptions, see Bachofer, 2014; Inthorn, 2006; Schneeberger, 2009). Here it is important to highlight that the term media in the context of this dissertation signifies people's self-expressed use of a certain type of media – traditional or online – to obtain information and news regarding the political affairs of the EU.

Furthermore, the studies that have examined the relationship between media and European identity have widely ignored the potential of online news and social media to affect citizens' sense of their European identity (Mourao et al., 2015). This lack of research specifically exploring the different effects of media exposure and how the use of different sources of media affects European identity highlights a research gap. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this research gap by placing the effects of media use and exposure at the heart

of its empirical analysis in an attempt to answer the following overarching research question: What effects (if any) does use of both traditional and online media have on European identity?

In addition to media, the literature on public opinion regarding European integration argues that the economic benefits of being a member of the EU and people's evaluations towards European governance are also strong predictors of their political support for the EU (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007; Gabel, 1998; Rohrschneider, 2002; Scheuer, 2005). In other words, people who believe that the EU is a source of utilitarian benefits and evaluate its governance structure as functional tend to feel positively towards the EU and have a higher sense of European identity (McLaren, 2006; Schäfer & Weber, 2014). Therefore, based on previous research, these two important factors should be considered while explaining European identity.

In the following subsections, the author first explains the data and methodological approaches adopted for the empirical part of this study. The subsequent segment then explicitly elucidates the aims of this research and what it adds to the respective field. Finally, the last section of the introduction presents the outline of this dissertation.

1.1 Data and methodological approach

Past research reveals that European identity does not vary dramatically over a short time span (Mendez & Bachtler, 2016), and therefore it is more stable in nature (Weßels, 2007). This suggests the need to use time series data to measure the change in European identity over a long period time. Additionally, the EU is composed of 28 members, and in order to assess the widespread feeling of European identity, cross-national data are required to allow a comparison across different member states. Therefore, this empirical work is based on a secondary data analysis of Eurobarometer survey data. In the literature, it is common to use survey data to provide empirical evidence on the identification of citizens, mainly because surveys such as Eurobarometer include a wide range of questions that can be used to measure citizens'

identification with the EU (Schäfer & Weber, 2014; Mendez & Bachtler, 2016). Accordingly, secondary data analysis of multiple Eurobarometer surveys appears to be an appropriate strategy for this dissertation, as it not only allows the comparison of different EU member states but also satisfies the need to analyze individual-level opinions of the EU over a long period of time. Here, it is important to highlight that each empirical analysis presented in this dissertation employs different Eurobarometer surveys. Therefore, the surveys are used based on varied rationales and selection criteria, which are discussed in the research design section of each empirical analysis.

1.2 What this research aims to add to the field

In this dissertation, the author studies the well-researched concept of European identity. However, this intensively researched concept has not attracted much attention from media and communication scholars. Consequently, few studies have explored the relation between media consumption and people's sense of their European identity (for an overview, see Bachofer, 2014; Staehelin, 2016), and even fewer have considered the operationalization of different types of media effects (for exceptions, see de Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011; van Spanje & de Vreese, 2014; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010). Therefore, the present study first intends to add to the growing literature by using media as more than an additional explanatory variable and placing it at the core of the research design. Second, it also intends to operationalize different media effects in order to determine the effect media use has on European identity, which is still not a prevalent trend in the scholarship. It is pertinent to mention that there is also a research gap regarding the political attitudes of citizens towards the EU and the role of online media (Conti & Memoli, 2016). Thus, the third aim of the current research is to fill this gap and provide a comparative analysis of exposure to both traditional and online media and its impact on European identity.

In addition to focusing only on media, this study also utilizes the insights provided by previous empirical analyses and examines the impact of economic and EU evaluations on European identity. In doing so, the study holistically considers different factors affecting European identity at different points in time. Beside these empirical contributions, the study also presents a critical analysis of the Eurobarometer survey and the battery of questions related to European identity and exposure to media. As a result, the author argues for the adoption of more coherent and robust measures for future research on the respective topic.

1.3 Outline of the dissertation

Before presenting the outline of this study, it is important to mention that the present dissertation is a cumulative write-up that consists of several published investigations. Therefore, the structure of this dissertation is curated in such a way that allows the author to bind the individual examinations together without repeating the core concepts.

Accordingly, in Chapter 2, a one-off funnel-shaped literature review is provided. The chapter opens with a broad (like the mouth of a funnel) discussion on identity and the conceptual ambiguity that surrounds it. After outlining this concept, the author then narrows the scope and draws on Social Identity Theory (SIT) to discuss social and political collective identities, and subsequently, European identity and its relationship with national identity. Next, the chapter comprehensively reviews the state of the research concerning the impact of media on European identity, as this is the core and consistent topic throughout the dissertation. It is important to note that the author does not repeat the conceptualization of European identity and its relationship with media in subsequent chapters; however, such information is available in individual publications.

After the literature review, Chapter 3 consists of a first publication, which mainly offers a temporal portrait of variations in political support attitudes towards the EU, including European identity from 2004 to 2017. Based on the descriptive statistics in the preceding

section, Chapter 4 then presents a second publication that addresses the hostile and mere-exposure effects of media on European identity. In this chapter, the author discusses the theoretical underpinnings and operationalization of the aforementioned media effects. The chapter ends by presenting the respective results and conclusions of the research.

Next, Chapter 5 examines the impact of the Eurozone financial crisis on European identity. The subsections of this chapter first take stock of the literature dealing with the impact of the Eurozone crisis on political attitudes. Second, the author draws on the political support framework of Easton (1965) and discusses how the Eurozone financial crisis has affected different tenets of political support in different EU-member states. Third, the chapter operationalizes two media effects (i.e., malaise and mobilization) and investigates their effect on European identity in light of the Eurozone crisis.

In Chapter 6, the author presents the final investigation, which compares how the consumption of news through online and traditional media affects European identity. Moreover, it studies the moderating effect of media evaluations on the interplay between news consumption from different media sources and European identity.

In Chapter 7, the author concludes the study by discussing the main findings and their implications and suggests directions for future research.

2. Conceptual framework of European identity

Since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, European identity has become a “booming” topic of research (Verhaegen, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2017, p. 163). This abundant scholarly attention has led to considerable variation in the conceptual understanding of European identity across different disciplines (Recchi, 2014). As a result, it has spurred “definitional and methodological heterogeneity,” against which studies purportedly focusing on European identity rely on completely “varying epistemological and theoretical assumptions” (Sojka, 2015, p. 19). However, for a proper investigation of European identity and the factors that decisively affect it, a meaningful and precise conceptualization of European identity is needed. Thus, for the sake of clarity and coherence, the objective of this chapter is to present the conceptualization of European political collective identity, based on existing theoretical and empirical frameworks.

Therefore, with the aim to distill the topic of European identity and operationalize it as a dependent variable, this chapter begins by briefly explaining the concept of identity, its ambiguous understanding, and the difference between its two categories: personal and collective (social) identities. Since the current project is concerned with European identity, which the author—like many scholars—deems a collective identity, the subsequent section presents the adopted theoretical underpinnings of collective European identity while relating it to the process of European integration. Moreover, in the same section, the author also explicates the intricate relationship between European and national identity. Finally, the chapter ends after reviewing the literature regarding the relationship between media and European identity.

2.1 Concept and categories of identity

Identity as a person's sense of self has been acknowledged as a "powerful" concept because it has the ability to shape an individual in more than one way (Ciaglia, Fuest, & Heinemann, 2018). It guides life paths and decisions and empowers people to draw strength from their affiliations with social groups and collectives (Brewer & Hewstone, 2004; Schildkraut, 2007). Due to its significance, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) conceded that identity is one of the most commonly studied constructs in the social sciences. Owing to this importance, the overall number of publications examining identity has steadily increased in the past few decades (Côté & Levine, 2002; Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011).

This growth of identity-based research has generated substantial interest from different academic disciplines but also many different ways of studying it, including a variety of definitions of the concept. Before it became a cross-disciplinary subject, the notion of identity was extensively studied by philosophers and psychologists (Bruter, 2005). Soon, however, the concept attracted scholars from other disciplines, resulting in significantly varied interpretations of identity. For example, in psychology, the concept of identity is conceived as something that bridges the gap between the self and the outside world—the idea that while individuals are unique and independent, their perceptions of themselves can only be constructed in relation, or opposition, to others (Mummendey & Waldzus, 2004). Contrary to psychologists' view of identity, which emphasizes social comparison with others, political scientists conveniently consider identity as something that denotes sameness; thus, it is the quality of being identical (Malmborg & Stråth, 2002, p. 11). Notably, this conceptual division related to identity is not limited to just one or two disciplines; rather, it is widespread in the literature. For example, the term identity has been used to refer to the characteristics and attachments of group memberships (Brown, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), patriotic sense of nationalism (Schildkraut, 2007), people's internal meaning systems (Marcia, 1966; Schwartz,

2001), positions taken in conversations (Bamberg, 2006), and social–historical myths in belief systems (Burkitt, 2004).

This conceptual assortment highlights the difficulty in answering the question of what identity is, as it can mean anything and nothing at the same time (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). That is why, in spite of being intensively researched, several authors (e.g., Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Gergen, 1991; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005) have questioned the utility of identity as a substantive construct, arguing that its definition is not clear enough for it to be used in any meaningful analysis. It is this ambiguity in defining identity, amounting to “definitional anarchy” (Abdelal, Yoshiko, Alastair, & Rose, 2006, p. 695), which has caused scholars to even suggest abandoning identity as an analytical category (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Notwithstanding such critiques of the concept of identity, many authors still argue for its usefulness as a concept as well as an analytical category (Bruter, 2005; Karolewski, 2009; Fuchs, 2011; Ejaz, Bräuer, & Wolling, 2017). In the present study, the author also endorses the importance of identity while dismissing the need to seek a unanimous and all-inclusive definition. The lack of a single definition should not hinder the examination and consideration of identity for any meaningful analysis. Moreover, striving for an all-encompassing definition of identity seems futile, especially as its meaning is highly contextual (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). This is because of the extreme contextual dependence in scholarship whereby identity is always examined in relation to its different classifications (e.g., self, group, social, national).

Despite the divergent understanding of the concept of identity, much of the literature on the topic seems to converge when it comes to the classification of identity (see, e.g., Keulman & Koos, 2014; Fearon, 1999). Scholars classify identity into two broad categories: a) personal (individual) identity and b) collective (social) identity, with varying definitions.

Personal identity is a concept that traces back to psycho-analytical approaches (Erikson, 1980), and though there are various definitions available, most scholars refer to it as the “original meaning of personality seen through introspection” (Keulman & Koos, 2014, p. 16), which in simple words refers to self-definition of the individual person (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). In addition to self-examination, psychologists view personal identity as a set of attributes, beliefs, or desires that a person holds to distinguish him or her socially. In essence, personal identity prescribes the idea of “I,” which develops as a result of incorporating (internalization) significant individual values and norms that the individual may perceive as setting him or her apart from others in different social contexts (Fuchs & Schlenker, 2006).

In contrast to characterizations of personal identity, which may be highly idiosyncratic, collective identities assume some commonalities with others and refer specifically to those features of a person that are defined based on his or her group memberships (Deaux, 2002). Thus, collective identities are distinct from personal identity and self-concept because they stipulate the notion of “we” rather than “I,” and as such, they depend on a collective belief that the definition of the group and its membership is shared by all those within the group (Herrmann & Brewer, 2004, p. 8). Here, it is important to note that the literature on identity commonly uses the terms of social and collective identity interchangeably (cf. Fearon, 1999; Weber, 2014; Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & Martin, 2001). Since both words are synonymous, this paper also follows this approach and uses both terms correspondingly.

In accordance with the scope and aim of the present chapter, the author now expands on the idea of collective identity and explicates its theoretical understanding while drawing on SIT as well as self-categorization theory (SCT).

2.2 Collective identity

As mentioned above, collective identities are focused on the sense of “we-ness” (Keulman & Koos, 2014), which signifies the psychological link between individuals and the communities

to which they belong (Herrmann & Brewer, 2004). The concept has been the subject of countless studies from various viewpoints. However, with regard to European identity, SIT has been the seminal theoretical framework adopted in numerous empirical inquiries (cf. Fuchs, 2011; Segatti & Guglielmi, 2016; Sojka, 2015), as it allows researchers to theorize the psychological process of both personal and collective identity formation while predicting its impact on socio-political behavior (Mols & Haslam, 2008).

SIT theory was first introduced by Polish-born British social psychologist Henri Tajfel (1978) and further developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Tajfel (1978) defined collective identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 63). According to this definition, collective identity is a multi-dimensional concept that has at least three attitudinal dimensions: cognitive, evaluative, and affective (Kaina & Karolewski, 2013).

The cognitive dimension implies an individual’s knowledge and self-assignment to social groups and communities (Tajfel, 1981, p. 229). This knowledge emerges when an individual perceives that he or she has traits that are shared with other members in the group (Fuchs & Schlenker, 2006). The evaluative dimension indicates the affirmations of these similarities and the positive or negative evaluation of these similarities, which allow the demarcation between in-group and out-group (Fuchs, 2011). Thus, the evaluative component of collective identities involves a process of social comparisons between different collectives through the evaluation of the perceived similarities among them, which consequently determines in- and out-group memberships (Kaina & Karolewski, 2013). Finally, the affective dimension denotes an individual’s emotional attachment and feeling of belonging within a collective (Schäfer & Weber, 2014).

Turner et al. (1987) developed SCT as a conceptual extension of SIT. SCT is an attempt to understand and explain the processes by which individuals form cognitive representations of themselves and others in relation to different social groups. Consequently, it has been extensively used in comparing different collective identities and in-out group relationships. The fundamental idea of this theory is that individuals place themselves and others into social categories based on their perceived similarities (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and underlying attributes that are particularly salient to a group. Thus, the cognitive process is understood as a function of identity that enables individuals through self-categorization to reduce social complexity and organize their social relations (Karolewski, 2010; Sojka, 2015).

Table 2.1: Dimensions of collective identities based on SIT

Dimensions	Process	Function	Usage
Cognitive	Self-assignment through perceived similarities	Reducing social complexity	Identification <i>as</i>
Evaluative	Comparison of perceived similarities	Demarcation of in- and out-group	Identification <i>with</i>
Affective	Emotional attachment	Creates sense of belonging	Identification <i>with</i>

Note: Based on Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1987; Karolewski, 2010; Kaina & Karolewski, 2013; Cram, 2010; and modified version of Sojka, 2015.

Table 2.1 offers a concise summary of the process, function, and usage of each dimension in the collective identification process. To sum up the above discussion, the author posits that the cognitive process of identity is self-placement in a collective based on perceived similarities, which serves to reduce social complexity (Sojka, 2015). The evaluative dimension offers a criterion for assessing the similarities and drawing comparison between in- and out-group members. The affective dimension describes the emotional attachment to the collective,

which instills a sense of togetherness (Cerutti, 2001). Moreover, from an operational point of view, the cognitive aspect refers to the subjective assignment of an individual in the collective, which denotes “identification as,” whereas the evaluative and affective dimensions signify “identification with” (Cram, 2010).

Here, it is important to mention that according to the function of each dimension and the scope of the present study, the author considers only the cognitive and affective dimensions in the operationalization of European identity. There are two rationales for not operationalizing the evaluative dimension. First, the present study examines the collective European identity, and drawing comparisons is beyond the scope of this project. Second, there are empirical ambiguities related to how perceived similarities are evaluated by individuals, which eventually lead to collective identity (Fuchs, 2011; Kaina & Karolewski, 2013). Accordingly, in the following section, the author relies only on the cognitive and affective dimensions to conceptualize the collective European identity.

2.3 Conceptualizing collective European identity

The theoretical framework presented thus far has discussed the key topics of this study. Now, in this sub-section, the author focuses on the main subject matter—European identity—by first reflecting on its importance and evolution as a topic for scientific debate. Then, the state of the research is presented along with the prevailing theoretical underpinnings related to the collective identity discussion. After that, the chapter continues and reviews the much-debated topic of national and European identity. In the last part of the theoretical framework chapter, the author considers the literature that examines the relationship between media and European identity.

Over the years, the concept of European identity—like many concepts in social science—has earned a reputation as a contested concept, with numerous definitions and interpretations. Different studies characterize European identity as something that is “flexible”

(Walkenhorst, 2008, p. 4), “abstract” (Stråth, 2002), or a “hybrid” (Maier & Risse, 2003, p. 29), without undermining its importance to the overall European integration process. With regard to the importance of European identity, the belief that the EU needs its citizens to have a collective identity in order to support the process of European integration is not new. In fact, Cerutti (2001) claimed that the question of European identity has been the subject of sporadic debates since the early 1950s. As early as 1973, it became part of the official European political discourse during the Copenhagen European Commission Summit (European Commission, 1973). According to Strath (2002), the European Commission (EC) conceived the abstract idea of a collective European identity to consolidate Europe’s place in world affairs as well as to pave the way for the construction of a united Europe. Thus, European identity is presented as an important construct and a pre-requisite for creating a dynamic European community.

However, the topic of European identity actually became a matter of public and scientific debate after two developments. One was the transformation of the EC to the EU, following the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which empowered the supranational regime (i.e., the EU) with extensive capabilities and competencies (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970; Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 2007). Second, the enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 raised questions about the borders of the EU as a regime. Such questions prompted debates on many considerations regarding the defining features of the EU from an internal perspective and how it distinguishes itself from an outside perspective (Fuchs, 2011).

Today, these debates are still very much alive, mainly due to the difficult economic, political, and social challenges that are being faced by the EU, including Brexit, the migrant crisis, and increased populism (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Postelnicescu, 2016; Buras, 2017). Among these debates, the concept of European identity is still considered very important, and it is one of the most prominent subjects in the research related to European integration and public opinion on the EU. The reason for this importance is its perceived role in the generation

of legitimacy for the EU (Fuchs & Schlenker, 2006). According to Beetham and Lord (1998, p. 33), the lack of a “shared collective identity is often considered the most serious of the obstacles to the development of political legitimacy at the European level.” Additionally, many scholarly publications stress that a gradual emergence of a sense of community and identity among European citizens could help in overcoming the centrifugal tendencies in today’s EU (Kaina & Karolewski, 2013). Thus, European identity is not only seen as a source of legitimation to the EU; it also serves as an important element that constitutes the political support for the EU (Carey, 2002, Citrin & Sides, 2004, Weßels, 2007, Fuchs, 2011). Due to the significance of European identity, there is a great deal of literature in the field that deems it to be the crucial dimension of a citizen’s political support towards the EU (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011; Schäfer & Weber, 2014).

The prominence of the topic of European identity in scientific discussions is evident through the scores of renowned publications on the subject; however, consensus on the definition of the concept is still lacking (Fuchs, 2011). The lack of such an agreement can be attributed to—among other things—the aforementioned inherent ambiguities and varied manifestations of the concept of identity. Despite these conceptual ambiguities, European identity is still a useful analytical category because it fosters mutual trust between Europeans, and hence, simplifies cooperation, the search for compromises, and further integration steps (Ciaglia, Fuest, & Heinemann, 2018). Similarly, in the debate on the political legitimacy of the EU, it has been stressed repeatedly that the development of a European identity is essential to the long-term stability and success of the process of European integration (Verhaegen, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2017, p. 163). Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine European identity in greater detail in light of previous investigations in order to grasp, define, and extend its understanding.

Due to its longevity in the scholarly discourse, the concept of European identity has resulted in a wide range of theories. Karl Deutsch among the early scholars who highlighted

the attainment of a “sense of community” and “we-feeling” among the public as critical preconditions for European integration. He argued that the collaboration between countries and the phenomenon of citizens crossing frontiers would enrich and perpetuate their feelings of being in a community (Deutsch, 1957). In contrast to Deutsch, the neo-functionalist theory of European integration (Haas, 1958) took a more top-down view insofar as the formation of a collective European identity was conceived as a result of European integration. According to Haas, instilling a sense of collective identity is the responsibility of the elite and political leaders.

However, over time as the economic cooperation between different member states increased, scholars began to argue that the sense of Europeaness is a product of economic benefits (Anderson, 1998) and the performance of national and European institutions (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Rohrscheider, 2002). Conversely, more recent research tends to agree that European identity is a multidimensional concept, and it cannot be explained only through economic benefits and institutional performance (Delanty, 2002; Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011).

Thus, in the quest to refine and better understand the concept of European identity, scholars opted for interdisciplinary theories that sparked the interest of academics belonging to different disciplines. Among different frameworks, social identity and self-categorization theories from social psychology (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1987) have made significant contributions, and both theories provide the conceptual building blocks for much of the contemporary literature on European identity (e.g., Hermann & Brewer, 2004; Schäfer & Weber, 2014; Sojka, 2015). As mentioned in the previous section, research on social identity theories has been particularly influential in developing the key dimensions of identity (cognitive, affective, and evaluative) that make it possible to understand collective identification process.

Though most scholars have simply integrated the SIT into their investigations, others have also tried to extend it. Dieter Fuchs is one such author, who put forward an adaptation of SIT to the specific context of European identity research (2011). In his model, he distinguishes between the cognitive and affective/evaluative dimensions of SIT on two levels of identification, where he considers level 1 to be relatively more important. The first level deals with the cognitive and affective dimensions of SIT. At this level, the cognitive process signifies an individual's subjective assignment, while the affective dimension denotes his emotional attachment to the collective. Moreover, he further clarifies that affective attachment refers to *we-feeling* or *sense of belonging together* (Easton, 1965), and without it, the function of collective identity cannot be fulfilled.

Table 2.2: Dimensions of collective European identity

	Cognition	Affective/Evaluation
Level 1	Subjective assignment to Europe/EU	Affective attachment to the EU/Europe We-feeling/feeling of belonging together
Level 2	Subjective assumption of shared similarities within the EU/Europe	Positive evaluation of assumed similarities

Note: Modified version based on Fuchs (2011)

According to his adaptation, the second level deals with cognitive and evaluative dimensions of SIT. On this level, cognition means “subjective assertions of similarities and the positive evaluation of these similarities” (Fuchs, 2011, p. 37). At this level, due to the cognition of perceived similarities, individuals evaluate and demarcate members and non-members of the collective, thus comparing between *we* and *others*.

According to Table 2.2, collective European identity is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional and integrated identification process. At the first level, individuals self-assign themselves to Europe/EU (cognition) and also feel attached to it (affection), while at the second

level, they perceive similarities between other members within Europe/EU (cognition) and positively evaluate these similarities (evaluative). Here, it is important to mention that the literature concerning the hierarchy of each level is still imprecise and stresses the need for more theoretical and empirical evidence. Nevertheless, Fuchs (2011) model places emphasis not only on who identifies but also what this identification means and how is it evaluated in comparison to others (Sojka, 2015).

Building on the model of Fuchs (2011), and as a result of their extensive review of current literature on European identity, Kaina and Karolewski (2013) presented an adaptation of SIT. In addition to the three dimensions of SIT, they proposed a fourth dimension, which they called conative. In support of their argument, they posit that to examine the effects of European identity on different behaviors, researchers need to add behavioral intentions (conative dimension) as the highest level of identification in their investigations. Moreover, they do not undermine the importance of other dimensions of collective identity but rather stress that the conceptual framework of SIT does not take into account certain conflict or crisis situations in which behavior takes precedence over cognition; as a result, it may alter the identification. Thus, in such circumstances, it is essential to understand the behavioral intention in conjunction with other dimensions of collective identity. In her assessment, Sojka (2015) argued that although the conative dimension is significant, it is especially relevant for crisis situations, such as the recent economic crisis in the EU, which weakened the sense of identity among Europeans.

In light of the review above, one could infer that European identity is an important and multi-dimensional concept, especially with regard to furthering the European integration process. Moreover, SIT provides the substantive theoretical foundation for the conceptualization of European identity. Thus, considering the scope and discussion above, the author bases this study on two dimensions of SIT: cognitive, which refers to identification as

European/citizen of the EU, and affective development, which denotes identification with Europe/EU (Cram, 2010; Fuchs 2011; Sojka, 2015). In order to operationalize these dimensions in the empirical analyses, the author has used two different questions from the Eurobarometer surveys, which together serve as an adequate measurement of European identity. The cognitive dimension is operationalized through the question “You feel you are citizen of the EU,” with possible answer ranges from 1 (definitely yes) to 4 (definitely no). Meanwhile, the affective dimension is operationalized by the question “Please tell me how attached you feel to the European Union,” with the answer ranging from 1 (not attached at all) to 4 (very attached).

Here, it is important to reiterate that the current work is a compilation of different empirical analyses based on secondary data obtained through Eurobarometer surveys. Therefore, the operationalization of different constructs relies on the availability of the corresponding data. As for the different dimensions of collective European identity, the author has used both dimensions in all empirical analyses except in Chapter 5, where the unavailability of a relevant question forced the researcher to measure European identity only by operationalizing the affective dimension. This is not uncommon in the literature (cf. Schäfer & Weber, 2014); however, scholars have stressed the need to use more than one dimension to measure the multi-dimensional concept of European identity. Thus, responding to calls for more sophisticated empirical measures of European identity, this study—for the most part—relies on a two-dimensional conceptualization that takes into account both *self-identification as European* (cognitive) and the extent to which the individual *identifies with Europe/EU* (affective).

2.4 European and national identities

In this part of the chapter, the author examines the important relationship between European and national identities. Although it is not within the scope of this dissertation to study European

identity in comparison with national identity, it is still essential to discuss the relationship between the two, as the understanding of the latter has significantly added to the scholarship of the former. Moreover, the author also intends to dispel the notion that European and national identities are conflicting and cannot co-exist.

Accordingly, in their discussion of national and European identities, Jacobs and Maier (1998, p. 17) posited that during the last one hundred and fifty years, “nationalism has been a prime mover of the fate of Europe” and a powerful construct that has left a lasting conceptual mark on the collective identity literature. Therefore, it is not surprising that most sophisticated theoretical approaches to collective identities, including European identity, have been developed in the field of nationalism studies (Smith, 1992; Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991). Similarly, recent empirical analyses have shown that the overwhelming majority of people feel more attached to their respective nation than to Europe and the EU (for an overview, see Citrin & Sides, 2004; Fuchs & Schneider, 2011; European Commission, 2014, 2017). This theoretical relevance and prevalence of national identity assert that European identity is embedded in the national context (Sojka, 2015). Thus, to understand it properly one must examine its relationship with national identity.

Before discussing the relationship between national and European identities, it makes sense to establish what “nation” means and what constitutes its identity. According to the famous phrase of Benedict Anderson (1991, p.6), a nation is an “imagined community,” a group of strangers with an assumed sense of relationship. Discussing the attributes of a nation, Gellner (1983) suggested that what differentiates a nation from other groups with a shared identity is the search for political autonomy, that is, a state of their own. National identity is a type of collective identity that gives allegiance to the nation (Cinpoes, 2008). Moreover, it refers to a particular but contested set of ideas about what makes the community distinctive (Citrin & Sides, 2004). Irrespective of the content of national identity, Smith (1991, p. 143)

wrote that it is perhaps the “most fundamental and inclusive” of all collective political identities, and it is this notion that places national and European identity in a conflicting relation.

Scholars examining the relationship between national and European identity can be classified into three groups. The first group includes those who assume a conflictual relationship between European and national identity. In their view, the stronger European identity becomes, the weaker it makes national identities (Smith, 1991). In contrast to the first group, the second group maintains that national identities serve as the main reference point to instill and sustain the feeling of attachment with the EU, and so far, their claim has proven to be correct. The third group of scholars consists of those that follow SIT, according to which people are capable, in principle, of having multiple identities, and a particular identity becomes salient in specific circumstances (Risse, 2010). This notion that the two identities do not stand in opposition to each other is supported by empirical findings and has garnered widespread support in recent literature, which is why academics now presume that some mixture of national and European identity is the result of the Europeanization of political identities (Bruter 2005; Risse 2010; Sojka, 2015).

With regard to the character of the relationship between European and national identities, scholars recognize the multiplicity of territorial identities and their interactions, as reflected in the distinction between crosscutting, nested, and separate identity models (Hermann and Brewer 2004). In the latter model, identities can be separate if the individuals in different identity groups do not overlap. In contrast, the crosscutting model predicts overlaps in the members of identity groups but not for all individuals. For example, not all members of an ethnic group may identify with their nation and/or Europe (Mendez & Bachtler, 2016). In the nested (or “Russian dolls”) model, smaller collective identities are part of larger ones, (e.g., local identities are subsumed in national identities, and national identities within European

identities). A further blended (or “marble cake”) model has been added, suggesting that different identities can be intertwined to such a degree that it would be difficult to separate them, as implied by the nested and crosscutting models. Therefore, this strand of research implies that European identity does not have a conflictual relationship with national identity, as it is not a part of a zero-sum identity game (Smith, 1992; Delanty & Rumford, 2005; Carey, 2002).

In order to sum up the debate, the author recognizes the importance and influence of the concepts of nationalism and national identity on European identity. Despite this reliance of theories of nationalism on European identity research, the author argues that the EU should not be considered equivalent to a nation because it does not qualify as one due to a lack of common history, memory, or media system (Smith, 1992). Therefore, the attempt to instill a sense of European identity similar to national identity may prove futile and erroneous (Kohli, 2000; McMahon, 2013). Finally, the above discussion situates the relationship between European and national identities as complex but complementary.

2.5 The role of media

The last section of this chapter focuses on the core theme of this dissertation—the relationship between media and European identity. However, before discussing this relationship, it is important to take stock of the research that examines the coverage of media regarding the EU, which subsequently allows inferring the nature of effects media usually have on European political attitudes. Accordingly, this section at first presents the overview of the research concerning how media presents the EU, and what effects such coverage yields on different European political attitudes. Then, it outlines the importance of studying the impact of media, particularly on European identity, and it finally ends after drawing conclusions based on the state of the research on this topic.

2.5.1 Media coverage of the EU

The literature concerning how the EU is represented in the media has grown significantly in the last two decades, thus making the scholarship on the topic quite expansive. Therefore, to offer a concise yet meaningful synopsis of the literature, the author purposively selects studies that (a) reflect on how the methodology and research design on the topic has evolved, and (b) investigate the effect of media coverage on a range of different political attitudes towards the EU.

In the early 2000s, the scholars begin to turn their attention to explore how media represents the EU, and if such coverage can explain different political attitudes. One of the earliest study was conducted by Pippa Norris (2000) who investigated how European affairs have been covered in newspapers and television news across the EU by drawing on the *Monitoring Euromedia* reports curated by the EC. She concluded that the predominant topics in the coverage were about the monetary union and EU development, whereas the tone of media remained either neutral or negative. Similarly, Peter and de Vreese (2004) analyzed the content of 11,722 television news stories between February and December 2000 in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK, and France. Accordingly, they concluded that the EU remains invisible from the national media except during key political events and also found the news coverage to be non-evaluative of the EU, but when it was evaluative, it tended to be negative.

After the EU's enlargement in 2004, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) aimed to understand how consuming media content on European political affairs affects people's attitudes towards enlargement. So, they employed two-wave panel surveys in Denmark and the Netherlands along with the content analyses of TV news and national newspapers (n=1477 and n=1,797). Their results confirm media matters but only in a situation in which citizens were exposed to a considerable level of news coverage with a consistent evaluative direction. In other words, when people are exposed to a significant amount of positive or negative media

coverage related to the EU it prompts people to hold the same opinion towards enlargement as to the type of media they have consumed. In the same vein of discussing the effects of media on European political attitudes, a study by Lubbers and Scheepers (2010) based on secondary data including Eurobarometer survey concluded that increased media attention to the EU increases political Euroscepticism, but only in countries that are economically suffering; the opposite is true for those with good economic situations. Hence, their work highlights the link between media, political attitudes and perceived benefits from the EU.

In his multimodal study of combining experiment and European Election Study data to link media effects on public opinion to voting behavior, Nardis (2015) showed that positive news coverage increases the trust in the EU, whereas negative news does not make people distrust the EU and these results significantly vary across different countries. This study partially deviates from those investigations that argue that the effect of media on European political attitudes is contingent upon the type of consumed media because he found that is not the case at least for negative news consumption as it does not impact trust in the EU. In another recent study in which Brosius, van Elsas and de Vreese (2018) have combined Eurobarometer survey data and automated content analysis of broadsheet newspapers in 10 EU countries between 2004-15 investigates whether and how media information, in particular visibility and tonality, impact trust in the EU among citizens. Their study found that media tone and visibility have moderate direct effects on trust in the EU, and the effect of both visibility and tone are more pronounced when the tone is positive and dampened when the coverage is negative.

In light of the different studies discussed above, one can draw several inferences. The foremost is the general scholarly convergence that the tone of newspapers and televisions across Europe is primarily either neutral or negative. However, it is useful to mention that scholars have not always found negative media coverage of the EU leading to a negative effect on political attitudes (see, for example, Norris, 2000; Nardis, 2015). On the other hand, positive

news coverage is often found to be associated with the positive effect on attitudes towards the EU (see, for example, de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; van Spanje & de Vreese, 2014). Moreover, the literature also indicates variations across time and countries in terms of media coverage of the EU and its effects on attitudes.

2.5.2 Media and European identity

The idea that the media plays a crucial role in forming and affecting collective identities has been confirmed by scholars in various contexts (for an overview, see Bruch & Pfister, 2014; Fornas, 1995; Morley, 2001; Schlesinger, 1991; Silverstone 1999). For instance, Georgiou (2006) stated that “media ... have become organized mechanisms of great significance for constructing identities in local, national and transnational contexts within modernity” (p. 11). This role of the media in identity is also endorsed at the official level by the European Broadcasting Union’s assertion in 1993 that broadcasting played a decisive role in the affirmation of a collective identity in the then newly formed Central and Eastern European democracies (Luce, 1993).

Schneeberger (2009) confirmed the vital role media plays in the construction of European identity, as it is central to the formation and reproduction of collective identities to form an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). Moreover, due to their lack of firsthand experiences with politics, whether domestic, European, or international, citizens depend heavily on the mass media to obtain information about political matters (Ball-Rokeach & Defleur, 1976), which in turn affects their attitudes, including their sense of European identity (Rittberger & Maier, 2008).

Outlining the requirements of identity formation, Thompson (1995, p. 186) argued that “identity requires symbolic material for its maintenance, growth and transformation.” Therefore, in this process of identity formation, the news media play a relevant role because of their ability to (re)produce symbolically certain perspectives of the world and our place in it

(Olausson, 2010). Likewise, while explaining the role of media in European identity formation, Gripsrud (2007, p. 479) posited that the media—in his case TV—has the ability to create a European public sphere by keeping certain topics in the public discourse, and this “has been seen as both a solution and an instrument for producing a European identity.” In other words, the more the media gives coverage to European issues, the more likely it is that such topics remain in the public discourse, eventually making people feel related to them and thus instilling a sense of belonging.

Although scholars have studied the impact of media on different EU-related attitudes extensively, Triga and Vadratsikas (2017) revealed that researchers have rarely explored the direct relationship between media (coverage) and European identity. In the same vein, they argued that most of the research concerning media effects and European political attitudes is based on the assumption that positive media framing of the EU and its policies lead to positive attitudes of citizens towards the EU and thus promote a sense of belonging and European identity. In doing so, most scholars continue to indirectly examine the effects of media on identity while assuming that support for the EU moderates such positive effects. Consequently, they seldom address questions about the effect’s media have on European identity.

However, there are exceptions. For example, in a panel study experiment, Harrison and Bruter (2015) showed participants from six European countries different EU symbols and news stories. These symbols and stories were either positive or negative and were disseminated through fortnightly newsletters over a two-year period to study short-term priming effects and so-called sleeper effects on citizens’ European identity, which accelerate over the longer term. The study confirmed that the level of European identity of citizens changes dramatically in relation to the news to which they are exposed, and this effect increases over time.

Another recent study based on a representative survey (n=8500) conducted by Borz, Brandenburg, and Mendez (2018) in 12 different EU member states, also confirmed the

important role of political and marketing communication in constructing European identity. According to the results of their study, viewing EU project banners and placards increases citizens' identification with the EU. Additionally, the more exposure individuals have to EU media, such as Euronews, the more they are likely to identify as European. However, one could argue that these findings are mainly due to the fact that advertisements for the EU projects and the content of European media (especially Euronews) are inherently positive, and thus exposure to both naturally promotes European identity. In fact, such positive effects are not limited only to pan-European media. The research of Scharkow and Vogelgesang (2010), based on the Eurobarometer survey, confirmed that exposure to domestic media also increases the sense of collective European identity. However, their study disregarded the nature of media content consumed by the citizens and also overlooked the differential effects of traditional and online media usage on European identity.

In addition to survey-based investigations, content analyses have also been employed to evaluate the nature of content media used to frame European identity. For example, Bachofer (2014) conducted a study in which he analyzed 852 newspaper articles reporting on the European Parliamentary (EP) elections of 2014 and the Eurovision Song (ES) contest in four member states (i.e., Germany, France, Spain, and the UK). His study concluded that coverage of the EP election was informative and framed it as a national event that strengthened national identity, whereas coverage of the ES contest presented it as a European event, consequently promoting a sense of European identity.

Staehelin (2016) used a mixed methods research design, including both content analysis and a panel survey, to investigate the effects of both media visibility and tone on EU identity and utilitarian attitude dimensions. He conducted a four-wave panel survey during the six months leading up to the 2014 EP elections in the Netherlands, and a total of 6915 (average response rate of 83.3%) people responded. Additionally, he analyzed the content of 4133 news

stories collected from six leading media outlets, including two broadsheet newspapers, one tabloid, one public journal, one private TV channel, and one webpage. One important conclusion of the study was that visibility alone does not explain European identity unless coupled with the tone of the media. Furthermore, the study confirmed that media effects are stronger on utilitarian attitudes than on European identity. This result signifies that identity is a stable dimension of one's attitude (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011), and thus it is less prone to change in a short span of time.

Despite the progress with regard to increasing academic attention towards research on media and political support for the EU, some scholars consider this growth unsatisfactory. In their recent study, Conti and Memoli (2016) complained that while the literature confirms the influence of the media on people's understanding of and perceptions about politics, its impact on attitudes, particularly toward the EU, has been neglected. Furthermore, most scholarly attention has been paid to traditional media representations about the EU and its effects on political support (cf. Bayley & Williams, 2012; de Wilde, Michailidou, & Trenz, 2013), thus neglecting the role of online media.

Similar criticisms are true and even more apparent for investigations of the role of media in European identity. There is a paucity of studies exploring the direct relationship between media and European identity (Triga & Vadratsikas, 2017). Furthermore, the studies that have addressed this issue have limited their scope to operationalizing the wide range of media effects available in the communication science literature and have generally relied on framing (cf. Staehelin, 2016; Bachofer, 2014). The reason to extend this scope is because media affect human attitudes in different ways. Therefore, limiting our investigations to specific effects only confines our understanding and ability to explain the other possible ways in which media can influence collective identities. Additionally, the literature has largely failed to compare the effects of both traditional and online media use on European identity, typically

only investigating the relationship between traditional media and European identity. This lack of studies comparing online/traditional media makes it challenging to answer the critical question: Do media effects on European identity vary for different types of media? However, despite the critique, the author concedes that academic attention to this issue has slowly but gradually been growing and expanding (see, e.g., Hillje, 2013; Staehelin, 2016).

In light of the discussion above, the author summarizes and highlights the key points presented in the literature review. The foremost is the crucial role of media in constructing and affecting people's sense of European identity. Although the body of literature on this topic is growing, there are still many research gaps, such as (a) investigating the direct role of media on European identity and not considering it as a proxy of political support, (b) integrating additional media effects, and (c) assessing those effects for both traditional and online media across all EU member states. Therefore, the current dissertation is an attempt to fill those gaps and add to the growing literature on the subject.

3. Exploratory data analysis of regional European public opinion

Ejaz, W. (2016). Assessing collective European identity on regional level: A secondary data analysis of Eurobarometer 2004–12 . In Y. Esina (Ed.), *ISSEI Conference* (pp. 151-62). Porto: Catholic University of Portugal.

In the introduction, the author explained that this work is a compilation of multiple empirical analyses. Hence, the present chapter is the first such analysis conducted in the early phase of this dissertation project. At that stage, the author interpreted positive public opinion (or public support) for the EU as indicators of identity. Therefore, in the present chapter, the author presents a descriptive analysis of various indicators of public opinion for the EU while also considering them as measures of European identity. As previously mentioned, Triga and Vadratsikas (2017) revealed that this trend of indirectly measuring European identity is widespread among scholars, and they urged delineating both concepts.

Accordingly, the author has modified the empirical part of the study. The current version now contains not only descriptive statistics related to support indicators but also measures of European identity in the discussion section of this chapter. Additionally, the following paper has also updated the time frame of data and now presents the analysis from 2004-17. In doing so, the paper not only distinguishes support indicators and European identity but also offers analysis based on recent data. However, it is important to note that the study

design and argumentation remain similar to those in the original article, with minor improvements, whereas the empirical part has been significantly extended and improved.

3.1 Introduction:

With the motto “Unity in diversity,” the EU “(...) signifies how Europeans have come together in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity (...)” (Constantin, 2012). Today the EU represents one continent, one currency, striving to be a community working together in a global world market, while at the same time being shaped and enriched by numerous diverse cultures, traditions, and languages. These political, social, and economic developments highlight the strong transformation of what was once a war-torn continent into a key global player. However, despite abolishing territorial boundaries and bringing countries closer, there are unseen psychological (prejudice, discrimination, false opinion etc.) barriers economic and political challenges that still exist. These challenges hamper the EU’s effort to develop cohesion and a sense of belonging together among Europeans. A considerable number of studies imply that the sense of togetherness or common identity among Europeans is a pre-requisite for a functioning democratic polity because it offers legitimacy to the EU.

The current study acknowledges the significance and relevance of collective European identity because it ensures further European integration, which seems to be the goal of the EU, as reflected in its various policies and projects, notably, EUNAMUS, EUROIDENTITIES, and CRIC. For example, EUNAMUS (European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European citizen) is a research project aimed to improve the way in which European national museums act as “cultural glue,” contributing to the construction of collective identities (European Commission, 2013). Similarly, the EUROIDENTITIES project, which ran between 2008 and 2011 under the stewardship of Queen’s University of Belfast, aimed to improve the understanding of the sense of European identity among ordinary citizens and its impact on the long-term success of the EU (European Commission, 2017). One of the many

goals of these programs was to increase the understanding of how people in different member states can develop communal attitudes on the basis of cultural artifacts and collective European identity (European Commission, 2012). In the wake of such intensive EU policies and integration efforts, it makes sense to evaluate the impact of such programs by generally assessing the public opinion towards the EU and examining whether such efforts resulted in making Europeans feel integrated and cohesive.

Hence, the present study utilizes the Eurobarometer surveys and presents an explorative descriptive analysis (EDA) of various dimensions of public opinion that indicate a sense of togetherness among Europeans from 2004 to 2017 at a macro (regional) level. There are two reasons to choose this specific timeframe. First, the EU approved its biggest enlargement in 2004, adding 15 new member states, which raised concerns regarding the cohesiveness of European polity (Sojka, 2015). Therefore, starting from 2004 allows the author to examine how the attitudes immediately after the expansion may have varied in different regions. Second, the present analysis extends until 2017, which gives the most up-to-date insights on the public opinion towards the EU across all member states, classified in different regions based on their geographical cardinals: North, South, East, and West. Analyzing public opinion across time and at macro level can offer an aggregated perspective of the trend, showing how people's different attitudes towards the EU developed.

In light of the introduction, the following sub-section presents the argument that the different institutions of the EU are suitable instruments for instilling a sense of collective identity among Europeans. These institutions can garner public political support, which then effectively translates into a collective identity. The subsequent section details the method and the results of the analysis. Finally, the paper ends by discussing the findings and limitations.

3.2 EU institutions as identity builders

Scholarship pertaining to identity has become highly contested terrain in the social sciences, and some scholars even believe that the term is somewhat overemphasized (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). However, the scope of the present chapter is not to discuss the conceptualization of European identity but to assess different public opinion measures that reflect support for the EU. The author believes that these indicators are related and that support for the EU leads to the feeling of European identity.

The EU's quest to go beyond its technocratic character and form a new European identity can be traced back to its first official formulation in 1973 in the "Declaration on European identity," which it argued was "one of the central issues facing the EU today" (Mayer & Palmowski, 2004). Today, the EU and its various institutions are striving to make Europeans feel a sense of togetherness as part of a supranational community. Such efforts are not only well documented but also academically validated through different studies, which particularly highlight the relevance of the EU and its ability to instill a sense of European identity (Shore, 2000).

According to Laffan (2004, p. 75) the EU, as a "macrosocial organization," has a major impact on people's sense of collective identity. She considers the EU as an "identity builder" because it has developed a unique set of symbols that are important in identity construction, and it offers a representation of Europeans in the global system that gives citizens a sense of collectivity and community. Similarly, Citrin and Sides (2004) posited that EU institutions, through their engagement and interaction with people, could help build supranational identities. In accordance with these assertions, empirical studies have also found that support for the EU positively affects European identity. For example, Verhaegen et al. (2017) showed that EU support, measured as perceiving membership in the EU as good or neutral, increases European identity significantly.

Thus, in the current study, the author argues that the identity of people across Europe can be assessed through their perceptions towards the EU, as the EU is the central authoritative unit and key actor. Furthermore, the author argues that people's perceptions toward the EU vary across each member state due to many factors, including each member's own experience, economic outcomes, geographic location, and interaction with the EU. This results in significant variance in public opinion toward the EU, which depends on different factors in each country. Therefore, instead of examining varying levels of public perception, the present study assesses aggregated public opinion toward the EU in different member states classified according to their geographic cardinal locations. In the following section, the author explains the reasons for the selection of secondary specific data for the analysis and classification of different member states.

3.3 Research design and questions

The current research relies on the secondary data analysis of Standard and Special—which usually carry a specific theme—Eurobarometer surveys between 2004 and 2017. Eurobarometer is a survey used to monitor public opinion in the EU that is conducted by internationally recognized survey research institutes on behalf of the European Commission and its responsible Directorate-General(s) and departments (GESIS, 2012). A total of 96 Eurobarometer surveys from 2004 to 2017 have been studied, but not all are necessarily used in the analysis. Consequently, different surveys are used in answering different questions. The reasons for not using all and different surveys for each analysis are the absence of relevant questions and consistent modifications in the Eurobarometer questions from 2004 to 2017. Moreover, to offer concise results, the author has used one survey per year to answer a single question, and during the selection, preference was given to the standard Eurobarometer. In other words, if the question in the specific year was asked in both the standard and special surveys, the author preferred to use the former.

In many previous studies, scholars have worked with either individual member states or grouped them on the basis of various criteria, including but not limited to economic growth (Schäfer & Weber, 2014), EU membership duration (Toshkov, Kortenska, Dimitrova, & Fagan, 2014), and pro and Eurosceptic attitudes (Bølstad, 2014). However, few studies have based their classification of the EU-member states based on the classification provided by the UN, which refers to the geographic cardinal locations, and those that did follow such approach did not offer analysis ranging from 2004 to 2017. The author has chosen the geographical cardinals for classification for two reasons. First, they offer a holistic view of public opinion at a macro level, and second, the author argues that the other commonly used criteria (e.g., Gross Domestic Product (GDP), human-development index (HDI)) are meaningful but dependent on country-specific contextual factors. However, the location of a country is relatively independent of such contextualization and in some cases even offers more bases for similarities, including culture, climate, and shared history. Furthermore, the United Nations Statistics Division (2013) claims that classifying the countries into different regions allows obtaining “greater homogeneity in sizes of population, demographic circumstances and accuracy of demographic statistics.” Therefore, the author has categorized different EU member states following the said arguments and classification provided by the UN.

Accordingly, the researcher has divided the continent into four cardinal directions (East, West, South, and North) on the basis of the geographical categorization of the EU member states provided by the United Nations. Table 3.1 shows the United Nations Statistics Department classification of all 28 member states based on geography (United Nations, 2013).

Table 3.1: Classification of 28 EU member states

North	South	East	West
Denmark	Greece	Bulgaria	Austria
Estonia	Italy	Czech Republic	Belgium
Finland	Malta	Hungary	France
Ireland	Portugal	Poland	Germany
Latvia	Slovenia	Romania	Luxembourg
Lithuania	Spain	Slovakia	Netherlands
Sweden	Croatia		
United Kingdom (UK)	Cyprus		

It is important to mention here that Romania, Bulgaria became members of the EU in 2007 and Croatia joined the EU in 2013; therefore, these countries are added into the analysis after their membership. Additionally, while the above categorization is based purely on geographic location, there are additional commonalities among the members of the respective groups, which further justify the particular classification. For example, Germany and France are correctly placed in the West column because both are described as “twin engine” and proponents of European integration (Yeong, 2013, p. 9). Similarly, countries in the Eastern column have a shared history with the Soviet Union and can be termed as comparatively small economies compared to the other EU member states.

It is quite evident that the EU has a multi-level governance structure, and people living in Europe have consistent interactions with it. According to the structuralist approach (see, e.g., Blackburn, 2008), one can argue that people’s sense of European identity is derived from their perceptions, interactions, and opinions towards the EU. Therefore, in order to explore this feeling of European identity, which develops based on the varied opinions and experiences people have in different regions of the EU, the author proposes the following overarching research question:

RQ: What is the public opinion of people across different regions of the EU?

Prior research indicates that people's attitudes and opinions toward the supranational governance structure of the EU are not unidimensional (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011). Therefore, the aforementioned overarching research question can be answered with the help of multiple indicators that collectively indicate public attitudes towards the EU. Accordingly, following are the sub-research questions corresponding to individual public opinion indicator accessed in the present study:

Sub-RQ1: How do people evaluate their country's membership in the EU?

Sub-RQ2: Do people across Europe believe their countries have benefitted from membership in the EU?

Sub-RQ3: Does the EU conjure a positive or negative image among people across the continent?

Sub-RQ4: What meanings do people in different regions attribute to the EU?

3.4 Results

This section presents the descriptive results of all sub-research questions, which, taken together, reveal the state of European identity in different regions of the EU between 2004 and 2017.

Sub-RQ1: How do people evaluate their country's membership in the EU?

Through this question, the author intends to evaluate the perceptions (good or bad) of Europeans towards the membership of their country in the EU. In the literature, this kind of perception often serves as an indicator of a European identity based on the idea that people who evaluate their country have benefitted from the EU consequently tend to identify with it (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998). Thus, European identification is considered as an effect of profiting from the EU and its policies. To answer the posed question, the author has

operationalized the following question from the Eurobarometer: *Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership in the European Union is (a) a good thing, (b) a bad thing, (c) neither good nor bad?* Figure 3.1 displays only the percentage of people's positive (good thing) perception of their country's membership in the EU in different regions.

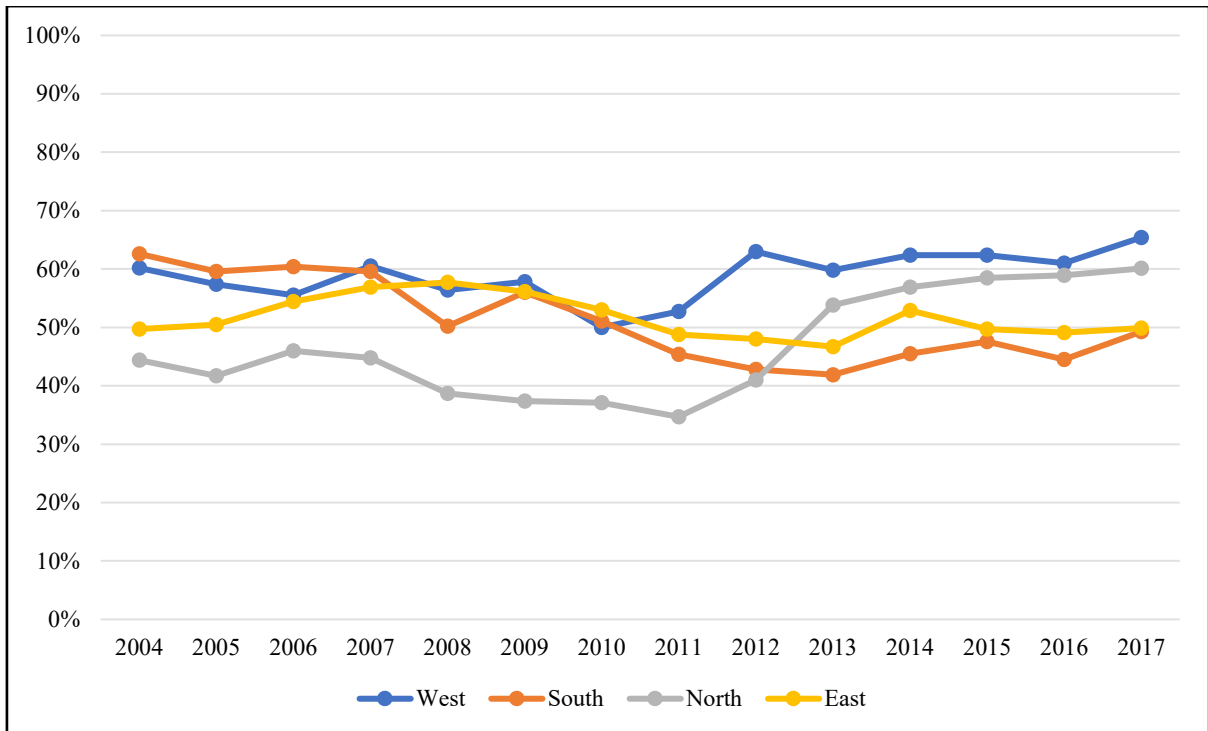


Figure 3.1 Europeans who feel “Good” about their country’s membership in the EU

Note: Own calculations based on Eurobarometer surveys (62, 63.4, 65.2, 67.2, 69.2, 71.3, 73.4, 75.3, 77.4, 79.5, 82.4, 84.1, 86.1, 88.1)

The results in Figure 3.1 indicate that, generally, all citizens in different member states feel good about being a member of EU, with the exception of those in Northern countries. The figure further illustrates that except for Northern countries, 50% of the people in all other regions felt that their membership in the EU was a good thing between 2004 and 2010. However, after 2010 this trend changed dramatically, particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe. This trend has continued in both regions, albeit inconsistently, but one can also observe slight improvements. Additionally, Figure 3.1 shows that people in Western Europe from 2004

to 2017 felt good about their country's membership in the EU. Conversely, Northern countries had the lowest percentage of people who felt good about their membership in the EU from 2004 to 2011, although after 2011 this perception changed dramatically.

Sub-RQ2: Do people across Europe believe their country has benefitted from its membership in the EU?

Similar to the previous sub-question, this one also evaluates the attitudes of people who believe their country has benefitted by being a member of the EU. The question in the Eurobarometer that deals with this utilitarian approach of people towards the EU is as follows: *Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefitted or not from being a member of the European Union? (a) Benefitted, (b) not benefitted, or (c) Don't know.* The following graph displays the percentage of people who believed their country benefitted from the EU.

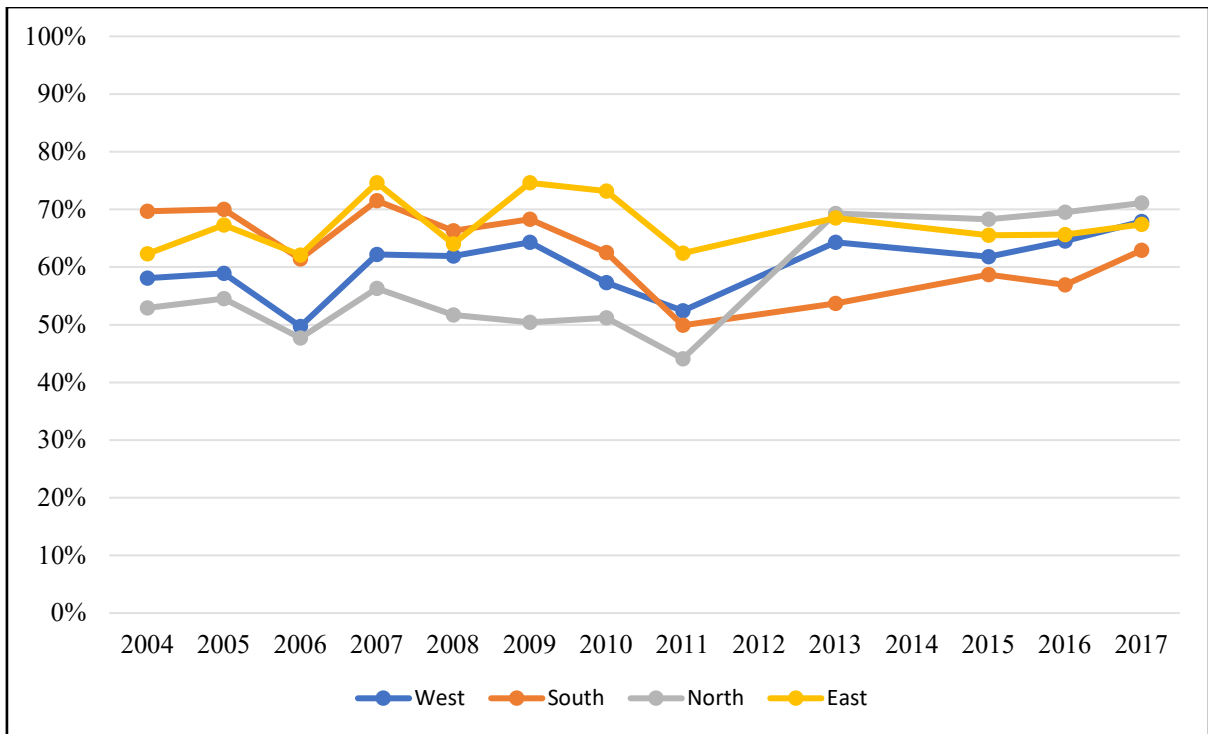


Figure 3.2 People's perception that their country has benefitted from the EU

Note: Own calculations based on Eurobarometer surveys (62, 63.4, 65.2, 67.2, 69.2, 71.3, 73.4, 75.3, 79.5, 84.1, 86.1, 88.1); The figure connects missing data points due to unavailability of respective question in any EB survey of 2012 & 2014.

Figure 3.2 shows that the attitudes across Europe generally remained positive before 2009 and then declined between 2010 and 2012. In Northern Europe, people's perceptions regarding whether they benefitted from membership in the EU changed dramatically between 2004 and 2017. In 2004, compared to other regions, people in Northern Europe felt they benefitted the least from the EU. However, in 2017, it appears that they changed their opinion, with 71% believing that their country benefitted from EU membership. As for the other regions, between 2004 and 2017, at least 50% of people in those parts of Europe believed that their respective countries benefitted from the EU.

Sub-RQ3: Does the EU conjure a positive or negative image among people across the continent?

In addition to showing that European identification is related to the benefits of being a member of the EU, the literature also points out that personal experiences and positive interactions instill a sense of togetherness (Roose, 2010). As the EU impacts the daily lives of Europeans, it is reasonable to imagine that people often face the consequences of its policies and have some interactions with it. This stimulates a certain image of the EU, which varies among different member states. The following question from the Eurobarometer is used to assess this perception: *In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a (1) very negative, (2) fairly negative, (3) neutral, (4) fairly positive, or (5) very positive image?* The y-axis in Figure 3.3 represents the mean value of people's responses, ranging from very negative to very positive.

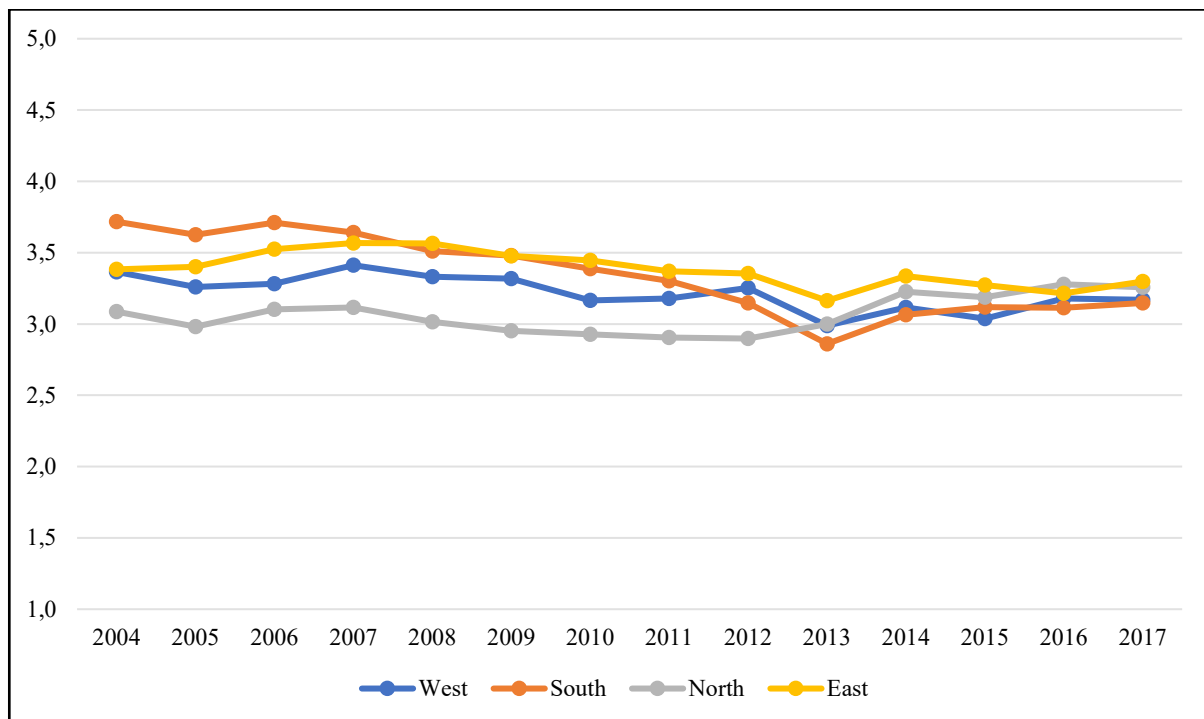


Figure 3.3 Mean value indicating whether people have a positive (high value) or negative (low value) image of the EU

Note: Own calculations based on Eurobarometer surveys (62, 63.4, 65.2, 67.2, 69.2, 71.3, 73.4, 75.3, 77.4, 79.3, 82.3, 84.5, 86.1, 88.3)

Figure 3.3 illustrates that people across Europe have a positive image of the EU, which according to Cram (2010), points toward their subconscious “Europe-ness.” However, the graph further reveals that over the course of time, the tendency of people to have a positive image declined across all regions. Moreover, the downward trend of the EU’s positive image is noticeable between 2010 and 2013 across all member states. Although after 2013 the image has slowly become positive, it is still not at the 2004 level, except in the case of Northern member states, where more people have a positive image of the EU compared to 2004.

Sub-RQ4: What meanings do people in different regions attribute to the EU?

The EU as a supranational governance organization signifies a number of different things to different people. For some it is a source of peace, whereas for others the EU offers freedom to work anywhere on the continent. In order to determine which characteristics people, attribute to the EU, the author considers the following question from the Eurobarometer: *What does the European Union mean to you personally? (a) Peace, (b) Economic prosperity, (c) Democracy, (d) Social protection, (e) Freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union, (f) Cultural diversity, (g) Stronger say in the world, (h) Euro, (i) Unemployment, (j) Bureaucracy, (k) Waste of money, (l) Loss of our cultural identity, (m) More crime, (n) Not enough control at external frontiers, (o) Other (SPONTANEOUS), or (p) Don’t know.*

For better visual presentation and descriptive analysis, the author classified these aforementioned values into two groups signifying positive and negative features of the EU. Accordingly, peace, economic prosperity, democracy, social protection, freedom to travel, and cultural diversity are classified as positive characteristics, whereas all other values are classified as negative, except for stronger say in the world, Euro, and bureaucracy. Due to their

ambivalent nature, these three indicators as well as other and don't know have not been considered in the analysis.

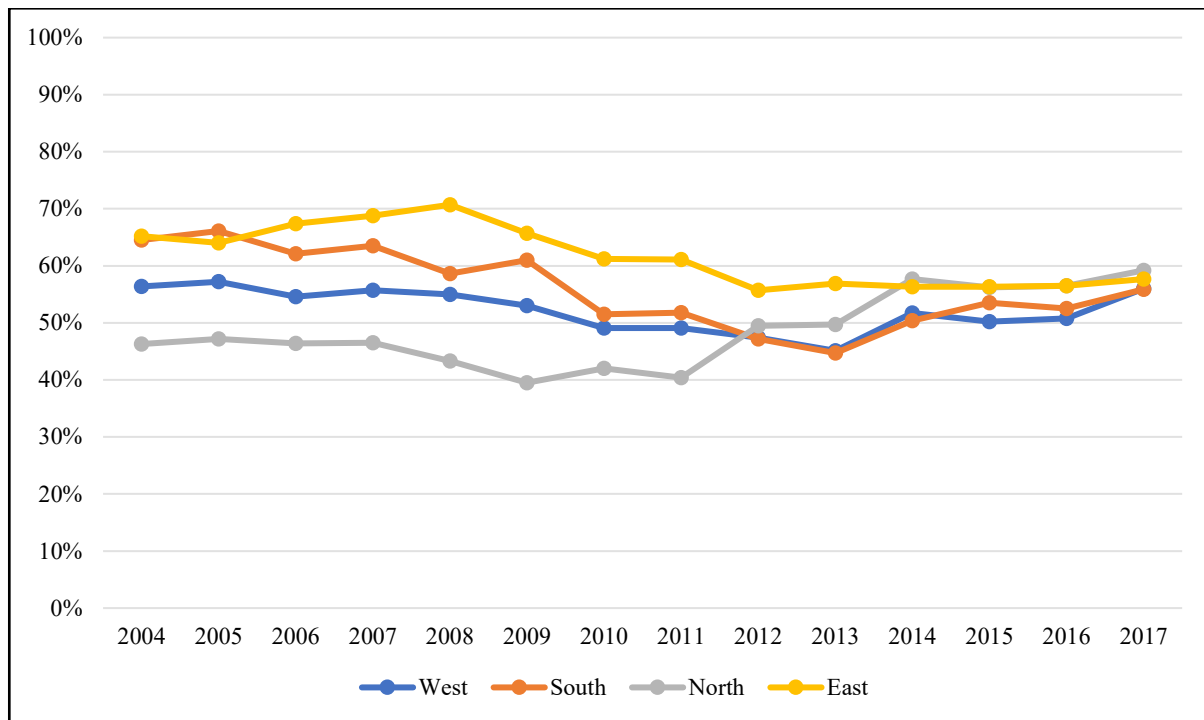


Figure 3.4 People who attribute positive meanings to the EU

Note: Own calculations based on Eurobarometer surveys (62, 63.4, 65.2, 67.2, 69.2, 71.3, 73.4, 75.3, 77.3, 79.3, 82.3, 84.5, 86.2, 88.3)

Figure 3.4 indicates similar results as in the previous analyses. Generally, in all regions except Northern member states, more than 50% of people characterized the EU positively from 2004 to 2010. This positive attribution witnessed a decline between 2009 and 2012 in all regions except the Northern region. Here again, the people in Northern countries show the most dramatic shift in their attribution towards the EU from 2004 to 2017. Noticeably, people in Western and Southern Europe did not assign positive meanings to the EU between 2009 and 2012, but this trend has begun to reverse since 2013.

3.5 Discussion

The fluid nature of identity makes it very difficult to measure (Cram, 2010), and it is even more challenging when one tries to encompass the concept of European collective identity on the

regional level. However, the author argues that looking at identity from aggregate and regional perspectives may highlight different characterizations of collective European identity that are not salient when investigated on the individual member level. Accordingly, the study initially uses four different indicators based on the theoretical argument that the EU as a supranational organization, can garner positive public opinion through its various policies and programs, which in result, instill a sense of European identity. The results show that people across the continent generally identify with the EU and hence can be said to have European identity. All the indicators reflect variations among the different regions with respect to each question, but collectively they follow a similar trend over the period of time in question.

As mentioned at the start of the chapter, the indicators in this study were initially assumed to signify the notion of European identity. However, based on the afore-mentioned arguments and the theoretical framework presented in the Chapter 2, the author considers that not all indicators analyzed in this constitute the conceptualization of European identity. Therefore, in this section, the author adds to the current study – based on the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter– and presents the descriptive statistics of affective and cognitive dimensions which denote the concept of European identity.

The affective dimension of European identity is operationalized through the following Eurobarometer question: *People may feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country, or to Europe. Please tell me how attached you feel to the European Union? (1) very attached, (2) fairly attached, (3) not very attached, (4) not at all attached, or (5) don't know.* The author recoded the variable and combined very attached and fairly attached into a single value. Figure 3.5 shows the percentage of people who reported feeling attached to the EU in different regions.

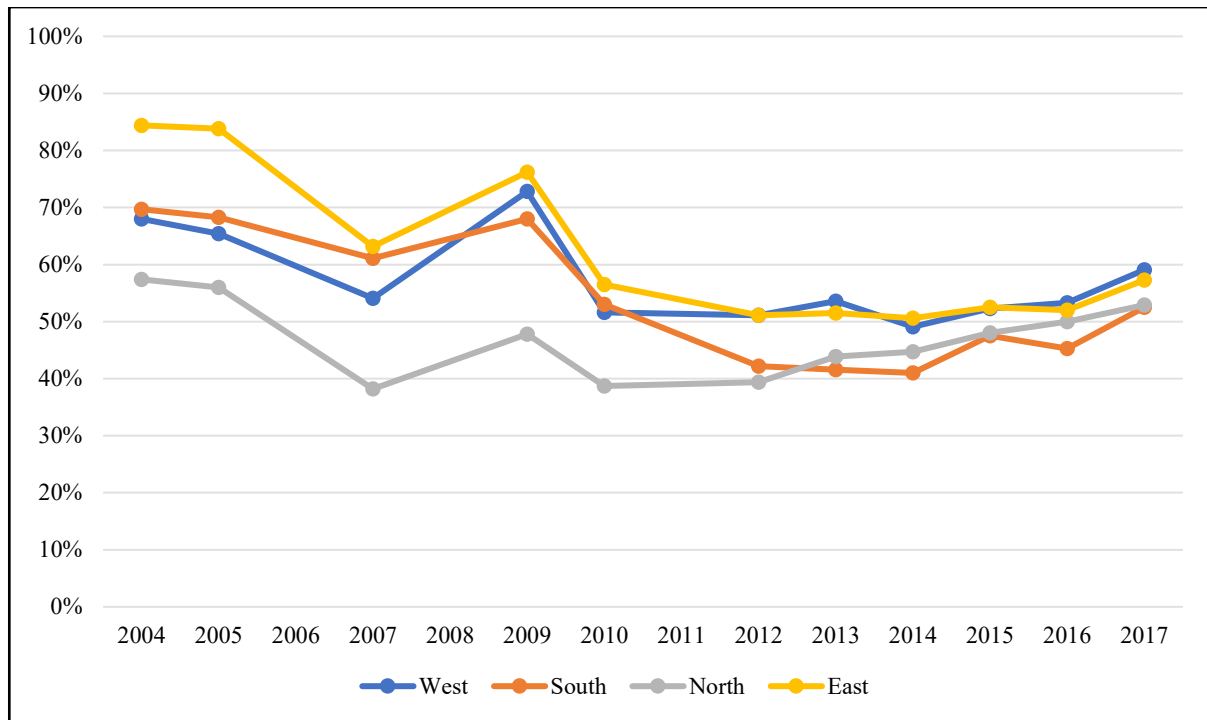


Figure 3.5 People's sense of attachment to the EU

Note: Own calculations based on Eurobarometer surveys (62, 63.4, 67.2, 71.3, 73.3, 77.3, 79.5, 82.3, 84.5, 86.2, 88.3); The figure connects missing data points due to unavailability of respective question in any EB survey of 2006 & 2011.

As for the cognitive dimension of identity, the following question from the Eurobarometer, which was introduced in 2009, is used: *For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds to your own opinion: You feel you are a citizen of the EU. (1) yes, definitely, (2) yes, to some extent, (3) no, not really, (4) no, definitely no, or (5) don't know.* To visualize the results, the author has recoded the variable and combined the affirmative responses. The cumulative percentage of people who reported that they felt like citizens of the EU are presented in Figure 3.6.

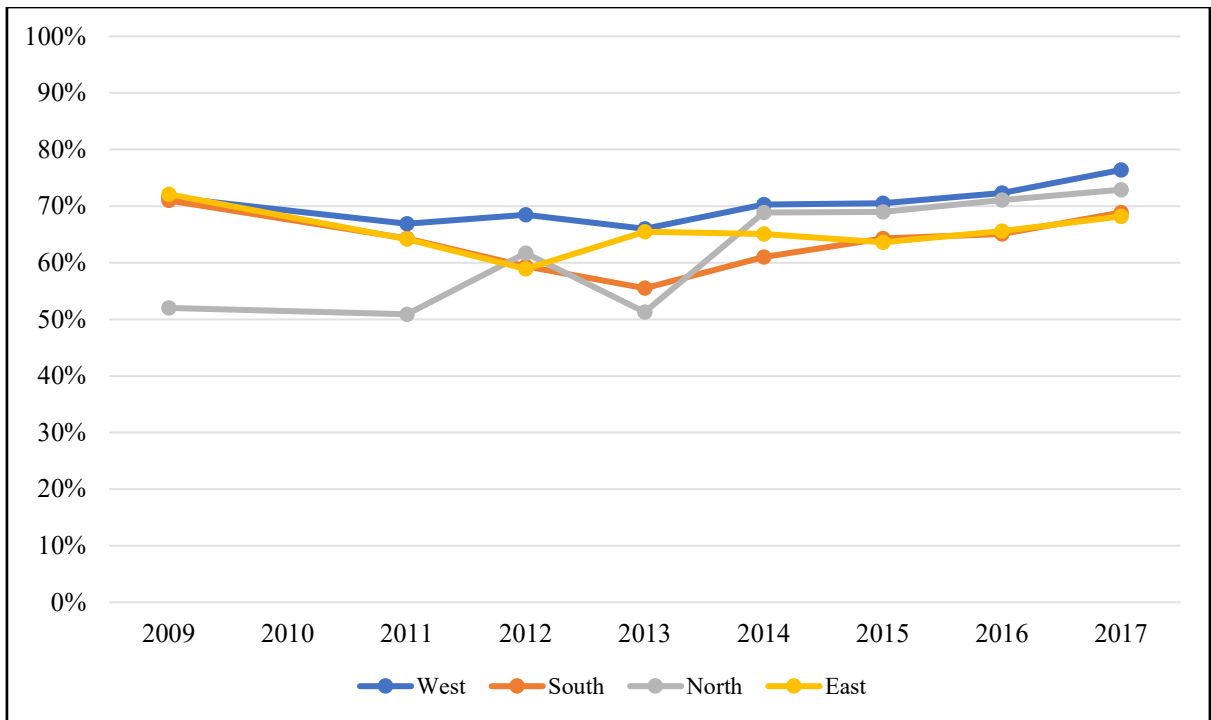


Figure 3.6 People perceiving themselves as citizens of the EU

Note: Own calculations based on Eurobarometer surveys (71.3, 75.3, 77.4, 80.1, 82.3, 84.5, 86.2, 88.3); The figure connects missing data points due to unavailability of respective question in any EB survey of 2008.

The results indicate that both the cognitive and affective dimensions of European identity follow similar patterns across all regions (i.e., readjustments of people's perceptions toward the EU before 2009 and after 2012). Moreover, the people in Northern countries seem to have become more positive towards the EU across different dimensions, while people in other regions have not changed their opinions as dynamically. In addition, the results also indicate that people's positive assessments of the EU suffered between 2009 and 2013 across all regions. Hence, the author speculates that during this time the EU was facing the financial crisis, which had negative effects on economic growth throughout Europe (Toussaint, 2017). Thus, it is likely that the crisis may have altered people's positive opinion towards the EU. Nevertheless, the descriptive analyses revealed that across all measures, on average, more than 50% of Europeans had positive attitudes toward the EU, and this trend was consistent in all regions except Northern Europe.

The present study now offers analyses of six different public opinion indicators across different regions of the EU amongst them two – one cognitive and one affective – which constitute European identity. The obtained results suggest a similar trend across all indicators and regions, which allows the author to assume that all indicators are related to each other. Thus, to confirm this conjecture, the author has conducted a factor analysis on individual surveys, and the selection of each survey was solely based on the availability of a maximum number of indicators in a single year. For the sake of simplicity and readability, the author has analyzed the data at the EU rather than the regional level and the results of which are given in the following table:

Table 3.2: Rotated component matrix (for six EU attitudes between 2004-17

Scale Items	2004 (EB 62)	2005 (EB 63.4)	2006 (EB 65.2)	2007 (EB 67.2)	2008 (EB 69.2)	2009 (EB 71.3)	2010 (EB 73.4)	2011 (EB 75.3)	2012 (EB 77.4)	2013 (EB 80.1)	2014 (EB 82.3)	2015 (EB 84.5)	2016 (EB 86.2)	2017 (EB 88.3)
Positive/negative image of the EU	0.84	0.85	0.84	0.85	0.82	0.78	0.84	0.87	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.78	0.77	0.78
Perception towards EU membership	0.83	0.85	0.81	0.82	0.84	0.82	0.84	0.84	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Country benefitted from the EU	0.78	0.80	0.76	0.78	0.82	0.77	0.82	0.79	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Positive/negative meaning of the EU	0.76	0.76	0.70	0.75	0.76	0.72	0.75	0.74	0.71	0.71	0.72	0.73	0.72	0.73
Feeling of being attached to the EU (affective dimension)	0.60	0.60	0.67	0.68	N/A	0.73	N/A	N/A	0.80	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.80	0.80
You feel you are a citizen of the EU (cognitive dimension)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.73	0.67	0.70	0.79	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.79	0.79
Initial Eigenvalue	2.95	2.97	2.89	3.03	2.66	3.48	3.01	3.02	2.39	2.41	2.42	2.44	2.39	2.41
Percentage of total variance	59.1	59.5	57.8	60.6	66.4	57.8	57.8	60.5	59.9	60.4	60.6	61.0	59.7	60.3

Note: N/A = not available (when the individual question/indicator is not asked in a respective survey)

The results of factor analysis confirm the notion that all six indicators of EU attitudes are in fact related to each other. Moreover, their loading on single component indicates their belonging to a single construct and supports the idea of using multiple indicators (when available) to develop indices to operationalize people's sense of their European identity.

However, it is important to mention here, that the author in his subsequent work has not always used all of these indicators while operationalizing European identity, and mostly relied on cognitive and/or affective dimension. Thus, in retrospective, he considers this as a limitation of this work.

Despite its relevance and significance, the study has some limitations. One could argue that the classification of the member states based only on four cardinal geographical units is not appropriate because it might superimpose certain collective attributes. For example, all countries that are classified as Western are typically pro-EU; similarly, the majority of Southern countries were most affected by the Eurozone financial crisis. Therefore, the author acknowledges that analyzing European public opinion and identity in different EU member states based on alternative aspects, such as GDP, population, and membership status, would provide additional and more helpful information. However, as the scope of the study was to examine European attitudes at a macro level in countries that are independent of individual socio-political contextual factors and naturally have more similarities (culture, climate, history), the adopted approach made sense. Furthermore, as the focus of this study was explorative, future investigations should use the insights presented here and attempt to answer the question of why certain attitudes varied in a specific way in different regions. In the end, notwithstanding its limitations, the study provides an up-to-date descriptive analysis of multiple public opinion indicators that are still prevalent in the contemporary scholarship of European identity.

4. Mere exposure, hostile media phenomenon and European identity

Ejaz, W., Bräuer, M., & Wolling, J. (2017). Subjective evaluation of media content as a moderator of media effects on European identity: Mere exposure and the hostile media phenomenon . *Media and Communication*, 5(2), 41-52.

The present chapter deals with the main idea of the dissertation that is investigating different effects of the media on European identity. Since, the importance of the European identity, its conceptualization and its relationship with the media remain constant throughout the dissertation. Thus, this chapter directly begins with the theoretical explanations of two media effects, i.e., Mere Exposure and Hostile Media effects that are the focus of following empirical analysis. Moreover, it is important to mention that the following sections are identical to the printed version (see, Ejaz, Bräuer, & Wolling, 2017).

4.1 Theoretical Reorientation: Mere-Exposure and Hostile Media Effects

The mere-exposure-theory suggests that people tend to develop positive attitudes towards objects merely because of the repeated exposure to these objects. No further elaboration by the individual is required (Zajonc, 2001, p. 225). The mere-exposure effect can occur without any cognitive processing, even if people are not aware that they are exposed to a specific stimulus. Therefore, recipients are not required to feel familiarity with the object (Zajonc, 2001, p. 225). The only condition is that the first experience with that object is not an explicitly negative one.

These premises fit the situation of the consumption of news about European issues. Even though the general tendency of the coverage on the EU is negative, the overwhelming majority of media content is neutral. Following this argumentation, the mere-exposure-theory calls into question the prospect of negative effects.

Research on the attitudes towards foreign countries has shown that the mere-exposure effect can be triggered by media use (Perry, 1990). Some evidence also supports the applicability of the idea to European identity. Studies that measured the frequency of appearance of EU topics in various national media demonstrated that the more frequently EU topics appeared the better was the breeding-ground for a sense of community and the development of “Europeanized national public spheres” (e.g., D’Haenens, 2005; De Vreese, 2007). Continuous exposure to news coverage about the EU makes people feel familiar with the EU. According to the mere-exposure effect, this perception of familiarity will lead to a stronger identification with the EU. Furthermore, this effect might be strengthened by the tendency of selected exposure (Slater, 2007).

It is evident that the assumption of a linear relationship oversimplifies the connection between media and identity because it ignores the role of the recipients’ perceptions and interpretations of the media content. Studies dealing with the perceptions of news slant or bias showed that recipients, especially partisans, critically assess the news with regard to the issue of interest and claim frequently that the news media are hostile towards their own party. Therefore, a close examination of the mechanism of the perception of media biases is necessary.

The observation that partisans frequently perceive the media coverage on relevant issues as biased against their own position is called the *hostile media phenomenon*. In a seminal experimental study, Vallone, Ross and Lepper (1985) showed that the media coverage of the Beirut massacre in Lebanon was perceived as biased by both, the pro-Israeli group and the pro-

Arab group. Moreover, experimental and survey studies have continuously replicated previous findings on hostile media perceptions. Hence, it can be taken for granted that there is a “tendency for individuals with a strong existing attitude on an issue to perceive that ostensibly neutral, even-handed media coverage of the topic is biased against their side and in favor of the antagonist’s view” (Perloff, 2015, p. 707). Recently, a meta-analysis of 34 hostile media studies concluded that stronger partisanship leads to higher perceptions of media bias, but even at moderate partisanship levels (low involvement), hostile media perceptions are detectable (Hansen & Kim, 2011).

Studies that investigated the hostile media phenomenon predominantly dealt with the identification of the mechanisms that cause the perception of bias (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Vallone et al., 1985). Only a few studies have dealt with the potential effects of hostile media perceptions, such as of the support of democracy (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005), the estimation of the opinion climate (Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chih-Yun Chia, 2001), and the willingness to engage in discussions (Hart, Feldman, Leiserowitz, & Maibach, 2015; Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008). But none of the studies directly related to hostile media perceptions link effects of media on European (political) identity, therefore, the insights contributed by this research provide some inspiring ideas for the research on the effects of media on European identity.

It could be argued that European citizens generally evaluate the performance of the EU with regard to the functioning of its institutions and the outcome of its policies. Consequently, they develop attitudes towards the EU polity. Obviously, the concept of “attitudes” is not identical with concept of “partisanship”, however they are related. From the body of hostile media research, we can conclude that it is likely, that citizens who perceive the overall performance of the EU as (very) good would claim that the representation of the EU by news media is too negative. Furthermore, citizens who perceive the overall performance of the EU

as quite negative would blame the news media for portraying the EU in an overly positive light. However, because the evaluation of an object is not the same as partisanship, it is also possible that citizens with a negative attitude towards the performance of the EU could perceive that the media draws an overly negative picture of the EU. Correspondingly, people with a positive image of EU institutions and policies might observe that news media providing an overly positive representation of the EU.

Based on these theoretical elaborations we assume that the evaluation of the performance of the object (EU) in connection with the evaluation of the representation of the object (EU) in the media would probably moderate the strength of the mere-exposure effect. Even if according to the mere-exposure-theory, no further elaboration of the individual is necessary, recipients will always make judgments about the sources of information (e.g. if they perceive the media to be hostile towards an object). We assume that these judgments modify the mere-exposure effect.

4.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Following the foregoing theoretical elaboration, two research questions are posed:

RQ1: Does the intensity of the exposure to news about the EU have an effect on the development of a European identity?

RQ2: Is this effect modified by the perception of media hostility?

The *mere-exposure-theory* postulates that the amount of exposure to information about the object (EU) leads to an individual's familiarization with it and hence, supports the creation of identity:

H1: The higher the exposure to news about the EU, the stronger the European identity.

Based on the theoretical assumptions and findings from hostile media research, it might be possible that hostile media perceptions modify the strength of the mere exposure effect on European identity (see Figure 7). Although the mere-exposure effect works subconsciously, it

is plausible that the conscious evaluation of the representation of the stimulus could reinforce or attenuate the mere-exposure effect. If persons perceive the media as hostile, it is probable that the mere-exposure effect is weakened thus we hypothesize:

H2: The mere-exposure effect is weaker in persons who perceive the media as hostile, than in persons who perceive the media as not hostile.

Furthermore, we argue that within the group of persons who perceive the media as not hostile, some might be particularly susceptible to the mere-exposure effect. We assume that among those who are not partisans and perceive the media coverage as neutral, the mere-exposure effect is even more present than among all the others without hostile media perceptions:

H3: The mere-exposure effect is strongest in non-partisan persons who perceive the media as objective.

Taken together we assume that the weakest mere-exposure effect appears in persons with hostile media perceptions, while the strongest effect appears in non-partisans who perceive the media as objective. The strength of the mere-exposure effect for the others is in between.

Furthermore, we assume that other factors also influence European identity. First of all, we assume that the evaluation of the performance of the EU has a strong direct effect on identity; those who evaluate the performance of the EU more positively will identify themselves more with Europe as others. Besides that, we will control for several socio-demographic variables like age, education or social status, which might influence identity as well. The complete model is depicted in Figure 4.1.

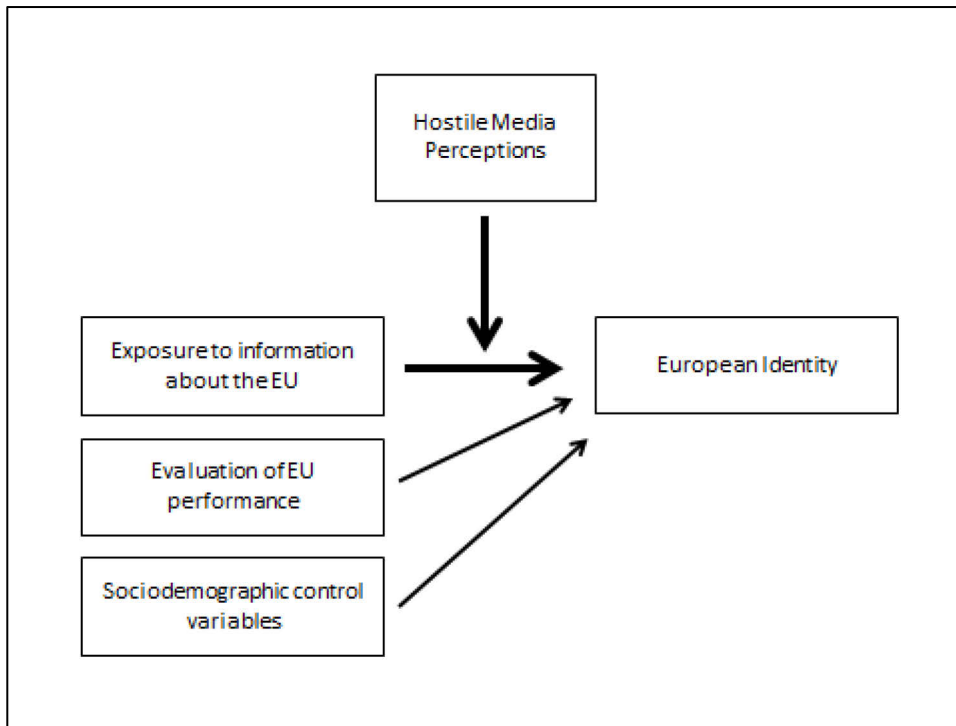


Figure 4.1 The variable model

4.3 Method

To test the four hypotheses, a secondary data analysis was conducted on surveys in the Eurobarometer 80.1 series that were carried out in November 2013. The data collection was executed by TNS OPINION (Brussels) as requested by the European Commission. It consists of survey data collected from the 28 member states of the EU. Overall, data gathered from 27,829 persons were analyzed. The data were weighted before the analysis. The weighting factors adjusted the national samples for sex, age, and region according to the share in the total population aged 15 years and older in the EU.

The dependent variable (identity) was operationalized by two indicators: Citizens were asked to answer the following question: “Please tell me how attached you feel to the European Union” by using a scale from 1 (not attached at all) to 4 (very attached). Furthermore, the item “You feel you are a citizen of the EU” was used in index-building. The participants were asked to indicate the extent to which this item corresponded to their own opinion. Possible answers were 1 (no, definitely not), 2 (no, not really), 3 (yes, to some extent), and 4 (yes, definitely).

The two items were highly correlated ($r = .67$). Thus, they were deemed suitable for index-building. Based on this index, the mean level of European identity was about 2.6, which was almost exactly in the middle of the scale (1–4). However, there were some differences in the level of European identity between the countries. The average identity in most countries was somewhere between 2.3 and 2.7. The negative outliers were Greece (2.1), Great Britain (2.2) and Cyprus (2.2) while the positive exceptions were Luxembourg (3.0), Germany (2.8) and Belgium (2.8). Here, it is imperative to mention that the author in the previous chapter suggested – as a result of factor analysis (Table 3.2) of six public opinion indicators – that the multiple indicators should be used to operationalize European identity. And in the present study, the authors could have used more indicators to operationalize the dependent variable. However, at the time of working on this study, the said factor analysis had not been done – therefore, additionally available indicators for the operationalization of European identity were not included.

The independent variable was operationalized by a combination of several items: The participants were first asked the following question: “Could you tell me to what extent you...a) watch television on a TV set or via the Internet, b) listen to the radio, c) read the written press d) use the Internet?” Possible answers were: 5 (every day/almost every day), 4 (two or three times a week), 3 (about once a week), 2 (two or three times a month), 1 (less often), 0 (never/no access to this medium). Later they were questioned: “Where do you get most of your news on European political matters? Firstly? And then?” Possible answers were respectively: Television, the Press, Radio, and the Internet. Out of these two measurements a new variable for every medium was calculated indicating if the respective medium was the first source for EU news (2), a less relevant one (1), or if the medium was not a source for EU news at all (0). Afterwards each of the four variables was multiplied with the respective media-use variable. By doing so, four variables (on a scale from 0 to 10) were obtained, each indicating the amount

of EU specific input from the respective media (TV, Newspaper, Radio, Internet). Finally, an index out of these four variables was calculated indicating the overall exposure to EU-news.

To operationalize the hostile media perceptions as the intervening variable, two measurements were required. First, the perceived bias in the coverage was registered, and the evaluation of the performance of EU was traced to identify the individual standpoints of the respondents.

The perceived bias was operationalized by three items. The respondents were asked, “Do you think that the [national] television present(s) the EU too positively, objectively, or too negatively?” The same question was repeated regarding the radio and the press. The answers were coded for each variable as 1 (too negatively), 2 (objectively), and 3 (too positively). The three variables were highly correlated (between $r = .68$ and $r = .75$), and the scale reliability was also good ($\text{Alpha} = .88$); thus, the items could be used in index building. Therefore, the three variables were summed and afterwards recoded into three groups. The values 3, 4, and 5 were recoded into 1 (too negatively), value 6 was recoded into 2 (objectively), and the values 7, 8, and 9 were recoded into 3 (too positively).

In the operationalization of the individual’s evaluation of the performance of EU, two items were applied for index building. The first item operationalized satisfaction “with the way democracy works in in the EU”. The responses were measured on a 4-point scale: 1 (not at all satisfied), 2 (not very satisfied), 4 (fairly satisfied), and 5 (very satisfied). The second item referred to the expected future development of the EU: “At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction in EU?” The variable consisted of three values: 1 (things are going in the wrong direction), 3 (neither the one nor the other), and 5 (things are going in the right direction). Because the two variables were positively correlated ($r = .42$), they were combined in an index. On the one hand this variable was introduced in the model as indicator for the “Evaluation of EU Performance” and

on the other hand it was used to operationalize hostile media perceptions. Therefore, the index was recoded into three groups: 1 (negative evaluation of the EU; 1.0–2.4), 2 (neutral evaluation of the EU; 2.5–3.5), and 3 (positive evaluation of the EU; 3.6–5.0).

To identify persons with hostile media perceptions, the individual standpoint concerning the evaluation of the performance of the EU must be combined with the perceived media bias. Figure 4.2 shows several possible combinations of individual standpoints and media-bias perceptions. In the upper part of the figure, the combinations, which indicate a hostile media perception, are illustrated. The two other examples are of biased media perceptions, but they do not indicate the hostile media phenomenon. The evaluation of a hostile media perception requires that the person has a clear standpoint on the issue (i.e., is a partisan) and perceives the media as biased in a direction against his or her own opinion. Both requirements were met in the upper example but not in the other two examples.

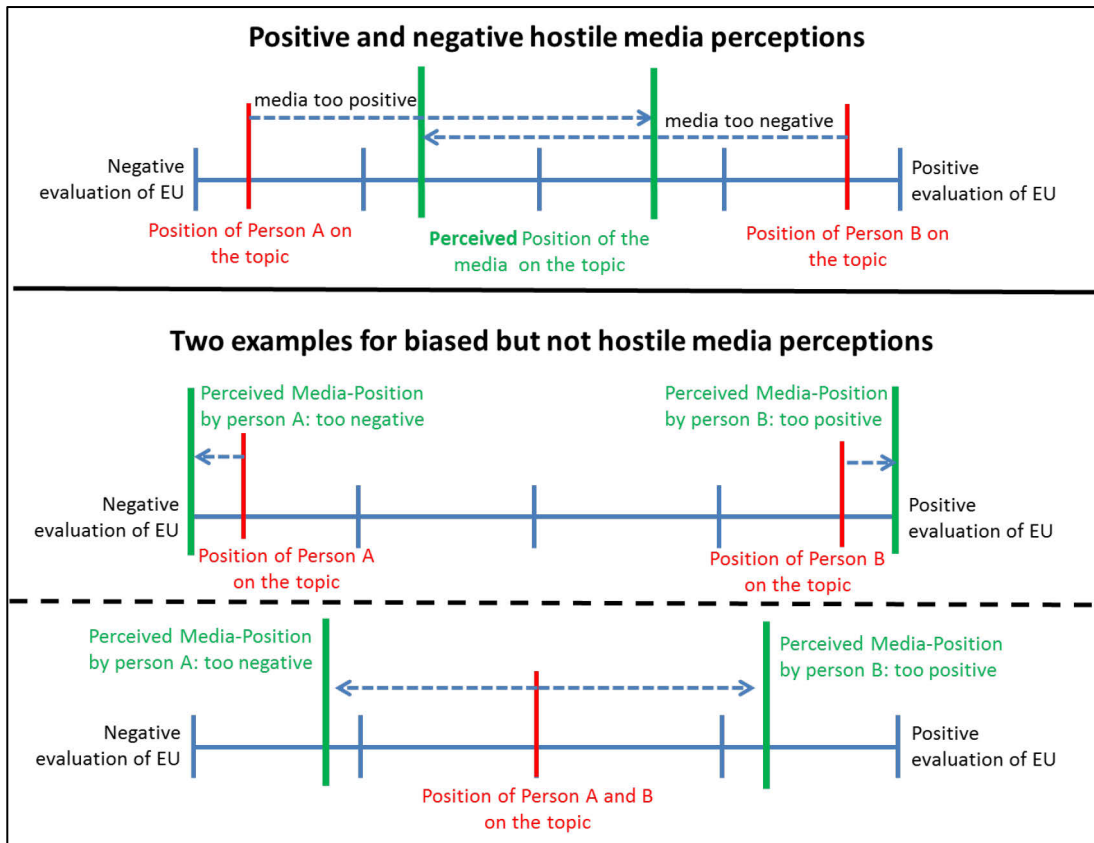


Figure 4.2 Hostile media perceptions vs. biased media perceptions

Table 4.1 shows the combinations of the values of the two variables that indicate the different types of hostile and non-hostile media perceptions. The respective numbers of cases of the groups are shown in brackets. As Table 4.1 shows, the group of persons who have hostile media perceptions consists of roughly 3,900 persons (group 1). The group with a neutral standpoint and an objective perception (group 3) is somewhat larger (approx. 5,200). Because this group contrasts the groups with hostile media perceptions, their perspective is designated as a neutrality perception.

Table 4.1: Hostile media perception (typology and number of cases)

		Evaluation of EU		
		negative	neutral	positive
Evaluation of the way the national media present the EU	too negatively	2	2	1
		(n = 2,156)	(n = 1,928)	(n = 1,099)
	objectively	2	3	2
		(n = 3,990)	(n = 5,163)	(n = 3,997)
	too positively	1	2	2
		(n = 2,810)	(n = 1,725)	(n = 924)

Note: 1 = hostility perception, 2 = no hostility perception, 3 = objective media perception by non-partisans (neutrality perception).

4.4 Findings

Regression analyses were conducted to test the three hypotheses. In each analysis European identity (mean = 2.6; on a scale from 1 = low to 4 = high; SD = 0.8) was the dependent variable and the media use index (mean = 3.4; on a scale from 0 = no to 10 = high; SD = 1.3) was the independent variable. Besides media use the evaluation of the performance of the EU (mean = 2.9 on a scale from 1 = negative to 5 = positive; SD = 1.3), age (mean = 48.9 years; SD = 17.8), sex (female = 52%), education (mean = 19.3 age, when formal education was finished on a scale from 10 to 40; SD = 4.5), and social level (mean = 5.5 on a scale from 1 = lowest, to 10 = highest; SD = 1.6) were introduced as control variables in the model.

H1 refers to the general mere-exposure effect: The higher the exposure to news about the EU, the stronger the European identity. The hypothesis was confirmed by the results of the regression analysis (see Table 6). Despite rigorous control of further factors, a small but highly significant positive effect (beta = .12) was observed, indicating that people who have a higher exposure to EU related news have also a stronger EU identity. This positive relationship between media use and identity was observed in all European countries, and in 26 of 28 countries the effect was significant (only in the Netherlands and Hungary it was not). Among

the other countries the strength of the effect varied: In Ireland and Estonia, the effects were the lowest ($\beta = .07/.08$) while in Germany and Malta the effects were the highest ($\beta = .18/.18$).

H2 introduces the perceived hostility as an intervening variable: The mere-exposure effect is weaker in persons who perceive the media as hostile, than in persons who perceive the media as not hostile. To test this hypothesis, the sample was divided into two parts, and the same regression was conducted in both subsamples. The first subsample consisted of those who perceived the media as hostile (group 1 in Table 4.1); the other groups (2 and 3) constituted the comparison sample. H2 was also supported by the results (see Table 4.2). The beta coefficient in the group of those who perceived the media as hostile was smaller ($\beta = .09$) than in the comparison group ($\beta = .14$).

H3 considers differential effects within the group of people without hostile media perception, positing that the mere-exposure effect is stronger in non-partisans who perceive the media as objective as in non-partisans who perceive the media as biased. To test H3, the sample of people without hostile media perception was divided into two parts and the regression analysis was conducted just for group 3 (see table 4.1 the group in the center). H3 was also supported by the results. The results show that the mere-exposure effect on non-partisans who perceived the media as objective (neutrality media perception) was (at least slightly) stronger than on all other groups ($\beta = .15$).

Table 4.2 Regression analysis: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	H1	H2	H3
Sample	Whole Sample	Persons who perceive media as hostile	Persons who perceive media <i>not</i> as hostile
n =	20,456	3,384	17,072
R² =	.20	.28	.16
	beta coefficients		
Exposure to EU-News	.12 ***	.09 ***	.14 ***
EU-performance	.37 ***	.44 ***	.32 ***
Social level	.08 ***	.09 ***	.07 ***
Education	.08 ***	.10 ***	.09 ***
Age	-.01 (n.s.)	-.04 **	-.01 (n.s.)
Sex	-.02 **	.02 (n.s.)	-.03 ***

Note: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$

To verify whether these results could be replicated in all parts of Europe, the sample was divided into three parts: seven countries with citizens having a low European identity were merged in the first group ($n = 8,094$); 14 countries with a medium level of European identity were pooled in the second group ($n = 6,994$); the remaining seven countries, with citizens having the highest European identity, were combined in the third group ($n = 8,704$). The regression analyses (including the five control variables) were repeated in these three country groups. The findings show that the general structure of the results remained the same. Table 4.3 depicts the relevant effects of the exposure to EU news (beta coefficients). In each subsample the effects were lowest in the hostile subgroup, while the non-partisan group, whose members perceive the media as objective, showed the strongest effect. This finding was

consistent in all subsamples. On the other hand, the effect-strengths varied noticeably between the three country groups. The mere-exposure effect is much lower in countries where the citizens showed lower European identity while it is much more noticeable in countries with high European identity.

Table 4.3: Mere-exposure effects modified by hostile media perceptions. Replications in different national subsamples

	Countries with low European identity	Countries with medium European identity	Countries with high European identity
n =	1,388/4,329/1,097	1,004/3,798/1,323	990/4,470/2,050
beta coefficients			
Hostility	.04 (n.s.)	.08 **	.12 ***
Non-Hostility	.08 ***	.12 ***	.15 ***
Neutrality	.09 **	.13***	.16 ***
Perception			

Note: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$

In all models, the five control variables: EU-performance, societal level, education, age and sex were controlled, but the effects are not displayed in Table 4.3.

4.5 Discussion and limitations

Based on the results of several content analyses (De Vreese et al., 2011; Peter and de Vreese, 2004) of media coverage about the EU, one might expect that higher exposure to media content about EU affairs might lead to a lower European identity. However, the results obtained in this study consistently showed the opposite. In almost all subsamples, we found (at least slight) significant positive effects. These findings support our theoretical assumption, that frequent contact with predominantly neutral information provokes mere-exposure effects, which promote the feeling of European identity. Even the unintended, casual contact with news on the EU provided by the media fostered European identity. These findings illustrate the

importance of a continuous coverage on EU topics by the mass media for the development of a common European identity.

The results obtained also support our theoretical assumptions based on the hostile media theory, confirming both hypotheses. Nevertheless, it must be considered that the differences in effect-strength were just moderate. Particularly in countries in which the citizens had a higher European identity, the discrepancies were slight. If the citizens of a certain country predominantly felt attached to Europe (at least somewhat), the mere-exposure effect was always relatively high, regardless of whether they perceived the media as hostile or not. This result was not obtained in countries where the majority of the citizens felt a low attachment to Europe. In these societies, the mere-exposure effect was just existent in people *without* hostile media perceptions. The effect disappeared in citizens who perceived the media as hostile. This finding points to the important role of media perception in media effects on European identity. Therefore, if European institutions aim to foster a common identity in countries with low levels of European identity, it is not enough that the citizens feel motivated to use the news about European issues provided by the media. It is even more important that media are perceived as neutral.

Finally, the results of the study also offer some room to speculate about the effects of media coverage on European identity, particularly in times of crisis. In the light of the results it can be reasoned that it is not necessary that a disintegrating event such as the Brexit or the Eurozone financial crisis immediately garner negative feelings about EU despite the excessive on-going negative media coverage. The reason for such an attribute is that identities are not constructed in a short period of time, rather it is a long-term process (Cinpoes, 2008). Thus, a crisis that either remains in the media or lasts for short time may not affect people's feelings of attachment with the respective political system. Much more important seems to be how the media coverage is evaluated by the people in the respective countries. If people lose faith in

the neutrality of media this could also affect the identification with the political collective. Thus, recent attacks from populists on the media's independency in many European countries might be an even more serious threat to European democracy than any critical comment of journalists about the performance of the EU.

In the present study, a secondary data analysis was applied, which has its own typical problems. The most significant limitation was that the analyses were confined within the boundaries of variables that could be deemed too imperfect to measure identity. Similarly, the authors also acknowledge the limitation of not using further available indicators of operationalizing European identity, which was suggested in the later phase of this dissertation as a result of an exhaustive analysis of Eurobarometer surveys from 2004-17. Additionally, the available indicators of media use combined with the perceived relevance of these sources for news on the EU might be considered of questionable appropriateness in measuring the amount of contact with European issues. It might be argued that the respondents were not aware from which media they obtained news about EU affairs. Thus, the indicator did not measure an EU specific media use but instead indicated the general use of news on public affairs. If the available indicators did not measure EU-specific media use but political media use in general, it is arguable that the observed variable relationships could be interpreted as mere-exposure effects. Thus, to address this potential limitation, the dependent variable (EU identity) was replaced by indicators of national and local identity. The findings showed that in both cases, the effects almost disappeared. The beta-coefficients of the media use variable on national identity and local identity were quite small ($\beta = .04$) respectively. Thus, it is reasonable to state that we observed a mere-exposure effect.

To operationalize media hostility, this study dealt with the evaluation of the performance of the EU. However, the evaluation of the EU is not necessarily the best indicator of partisanship. Better indicators of partisanship towards the EU would be highly desirable,

such as political party (pro-Europe or Eurosceptic) affiliations of respondents, but they were not available in the Eurobarometer data. Furthermore, the hostility of the media towards the EU was measured by using only one indicator (the overall estimation of bias). In general, the hostile media research applies a fine-grained measurement of media hostility, including, for example, the individual estimation of the percentage of favorable or non-favorable references to one's position or the perception of the personal views of the journalists.

Despite this critique, the presented results show the relevance of media coverage on European issues for European identity even for those who are not intentionally searching for information and news on the EU. But the results also highlight which problems the EU will face if peoples' reliance on a neutral coverage of the media erodes or even disappears.

5. Investigating media malaise and mobilization effects on European identity

Ejaz, W. (2017). Analyzing malaise and mobilization: the effects of media on political support and European identity in old and new member states. *Politics in Central Europe*, 13(2/3), 33-51.

Ejaz, W. (2018). Investigating malaise and mobilization effects of media use on European identity before and after the Eurozone crisis. *Global Media Journal*, 1-23.

As per the theme of the dissertation, i.e., investigating the effects of using media for political information on European identity, the present chapter examines media mobilization and malaise effects. However, it is important to note that the author has explored these effects in two different empirical analyses which were based on the same theoretical framework but differ in their design, and later published in separate journals. The intent to replicate the analyses was to examine the stability of results across two studies.

Accordingly, the results obtained from the first study (Ejaz, 2017) in which the said effects are explored by classifying EU member states in two groups; (i) old member's group contains countries that were member of the EU before 2004, (ii) new members' group denotes countries that became members after the EU's enlargement in 2004, and from the second study (Ejaz, 2018) in which the author investigated malaise and mobilization effect on the EU member states while classifying them on the basis of how severely they were affected by the Eurozone crisis remained stable. As the results remained similar therefore instead of discussing

both studies, the writer for the sake of avoiding redundancy presents only one study with slight modifications in the following chapter. Lastly, the author discloses that the modifications here imply improvements in the arguments and language of the following chapter which do not mean alterations in the empirical analyses.

5.1 Introduction

In recent times, the EU has faced a number of difficult challenges, including the Eurozone's financial crisis, Britain's decision to leave the EU (Brexit), and the refugee crisis. As a consequence of these political developments, one can observe a shift in the public opinion towards the EU and the process of European integration. Among all these issues, the Eurozone financial crisis particularly exemplifies the erosion of political support for the European integration by raising many questions, including the EU's ability to sustain economic growth and foster a sense of belonging and identity among Europeans (Luhmann, 2017). Due to the Eurozone crisis, several EU member states were forced to reduce their government spending and opt for austerity measures, which resulted in changes to the political landscape and even led to governments being ousted in Ireland and Greece (CNN, 2017). Therefore, the Eurozone crisis can be said to have negatively impacted citizens' perceptions of the EU and prompted a decline in political support for both national governments and the EU (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014).

According to scholars, the reason for the financial crisis to have severely affected the political support is because the economic benefits and utilitarian factors have always considered as a primary source of support for the process of European integration (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007; Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2006). Consequently, there is sufficient agreement in the scholarship according to which the cost-benefit relationship between the EU and its citizens leads people to support the European political community, and that, in turn, allows Europeans

to develop a certain sense of belonging and identification with the EU (Schäfer & Weber, 2014).

Hence, the argument that economic prosperity can instill a sense of collective identity among Europeans gained prominence in the literature, eventually making it one of the main explanatory factors behind the political support for the EU (Carey, 2002; Fuchs, 2011; Weßels, 2007). Consequently, aligning with this viewpoint, the current paper maintains that the Eurozone financial debacle may have negatively influenced the overall political support for the EU, including Europeans having a sense of a collective European identity. However, it is important to state that utilitarian factors alone are not sufficient to explain political support; researchers have found that affective factors such as post-material values can also influence political support (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011; Inglehart, 1977).

Notwithstanding the importance of the mutually beneficial relationship between the EU and its citizens, the current chapter, however, posits that economic factors alone may not be responsible for waning political support and the decline in people's sense of European identity. Media use also have an effect on political support, as past studies that have investigated the role of the media and public opinion on the EU revealed that the media have the ability to influence political attitudes and people's sense of European identity as well as attachment toward the EU (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Hillje, 2013; Peter, 2007; Staehelin, 2016).

However, despite the general agreement among scholars on the importance the media have in terms of affecting public opinion on European integration (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Meyer, 1999), few studies have explored the connection between media use and people's sense of their European identity (see e.g., Bachofer, 2014; Staehelin, 2016). Those researchers who did study the relationship between media consumption and European identity focused primarily on exploring either how the media covered the EU in times of a crisis (e.g., Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Picard, 2015), or on understanding the media's role as a facilitator in making

people more Euro-skeptical (Conti & Memoli, 2017). Therefore, the lack of research regarding the effects of the media on people's sense of their European identity and operationalization of these effects from the communication science perspective points toward a research gap.

So, to fill this research gap, the author initially aims at descriptively showing how the levels of different indicators of political support, including European identity, vary before and after the crisis. The descriptive statistics allow for an assessment of the correlation between the Eurozone crisis and both support and identity in different EU member states. The second goal of the paper is to test if using certain media (in present case the TV) to seek information on political affairs regarding the EU affect that European identity, and if this effect varies before and after the crisis among different EU member states, as each of them was affected by the crisis differently. In essence, the study tests the long-standing thesis that only an economically beneficial relationship between a member state and the EU will propagate a European identity among that member state's citizens, and if media use also has the ability to explain the variations in the citizens' sense of European identity following the Eurozone crisis.

Before examining the assumptions empirically, a theoretical framework of political support taken from David Easton (1965, 1975) is employed in the following section of the paper to conceptualize what we mean by a European identity. Subsequently, to assess the media effects, the study uses the theoretical underpinnings of the video malaise and media mobilization effects. Afterwards, the paper presents the operationalization of the independent and dependent variables along with the empirical analysis. Then, in the last section, the paper concludes by discussing the key findings and limitations of the study.

5.2 Theoretical Framework

5.2.1 Political Support

The persistence of scholars in terms of finding ways in which to compare the forms of governing institutions and political support cultures can be traced back to Aristotle (Klingemann, 1999). However, modern theorists have extensively used David Easton's (1965, 1975) concept of political support to approach this issue. It is quite a useful analytical framework as it distinguishes among support for the political community, regime, and the authorities (Norris, 1999). While explaining the differences among these three objects, Klingemann (1999) argued that a political community is a cultural object that goes beyond the particularities of formal governing structures and marks the collective identity of the polity. Meanwhile, the regime constitutes the basic framework for governance (Norris, 1999), and the political authorities are the officials occupying governmental posts (Klingemann, 1999). The current study adopts the following modified representation of Easton's political support framework developed by Fuchs (2011).

Table 5.1: Types and constructs of political support

Types of Political Support	Constructs of Political Support	Sub-constructs of Political Support
<i>Political community</i> Sense of community (diffuse support)	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European identity
<i>Regime</i> Legitimacy (diffuse support) Trust (diffuse support)	Legitimacy Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfaction with European Democracy Trust in EU institutions
<i>Political authorities</i> (specific support)	Short-term output evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of National and European Economy

The first and second columns of Table 5.1 denote the types and constructs of political support according to Easton, whereas the sub-constructs of political support are operationalized on the basis of the available data. Furthermore, the table also shows how Easton (1965) has classified the political support for the three aforementioned objects into two distinct types (i.e. diffuse and specific support). Diffuse support is mainly associated with the political community and regime, and it does not focus on the performances of certain components, but rather of the system as a whole (Beaudonnet & Di Mauro, 2012; Fuchs, 2011). To understand what the diffuse support for these two political objects is, it is imperative to look at each object individually.

With reference to diffuse support for the political community, Easton (1965) described it as a “sense of community,” “we-feeling,” or as a “feeling of belonging together” (p. 185). This idea of a communal feeling corresponds to the concept of identity (Bruter, 2005; Delanty, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005), and, according to social psychological theories, such an identity is part of a person’s self-concept and of his or her affective assignment to a social group (Herrmann & Brewer, 2004; Tajfel, 1981). Since the EU has transformed itself from purely an economic community into a socio-political community (European Union, 2017), it aspires for more Europeans to assign themselves to—and to feel attached to—the Union. Therefore, an affective feeling of belonging to the EU by individuals corresponds to the idea of belonging to a collective community, thus instilling a sense of European identity. So, in light of the given arguments, the present study considers this affective feeling of belonging to the EU—a political community—as a European identity that resonates with the concept of diffuse support for the political community (Schäfer & Weber, 2014).

Here, it is pertinent to highlight that the author while emphasizing only on the affective attachment to the EU in this chapter, does not intend to diminish the importance of cognitive dimension of European identity (for more on this topic, see pages 12-20). But it is due to the

unavailability of suitable indicators for cognitive dimension in respective datasets that has forced the author to rely only on affective self-attachment to the EU for the operationalization of its dependent variable in the present empirical analyses. Moreover, after doing additional analysis in the later stage of this dissertation and reconsidering its impact on dependent variable, the author acknowledges that additional indicators – besides cognitive dimension – could have been used to operationalize European identity, and he now considers this as a limitation of this work and offers renewed conceptualization of European identity in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Moving on to the second component of the political support framework, Easton (1965, 1975) argued that within any political system, the regime also requires diffuse support. However, he differentiated diffuse support for the regime by specifying two additional dimensions: legitimacy and trust. According to Easton (1975), legitimacy “reflects the fact that in some vague or explicit way [a person] sees these objects as conforming to his own moral principles, his own sense of what is right and proper in the political sphere” (p. 451). The second dimension of trust is explained by Easton (1975) as something that “will be stimulated by the experiences that members have of the authorities over time” (p. 448). In light of these explanations, the study operationalizes legitimacy through people’s satisfaction with the democracy in the EU, whereas trust is operationalized as trust in the EU. It is important to mention here that diffuse support for a regime does not serve as a dependent variable in the current empirical analysis, but as an independent variable.

The second type of support mentioned by Easton is called specific support, which is an attitude (or a behavior) produced by the evaluation of the authorities’ actions (Beaudonnet & Di Mauro, 2012). Thus, specific support is based on the perceived rewards of short-term outputs (Fuchs, 2011). In order to operationalize the specific support for political authorities, the author considers utilizing citizen’s evaluations of their national and European economies.

Moreover, due to extensive interdependence between the national and the European economy, it makes sense to use citizen's evaluations as suitable indicators for measuring specific support for political incumbents.

5.2.2 Media Malaise and Mobilization Effects

When it comes to effects of the media on political attitudes, a variety of studies have focused on media use as the explaining variable. One particular effect that has been examined, and which is also the focus of this study, is media malaise. The concept of malaise emerged in the literature when Kurt and Gladys Lang (1966) connected the increase in news consumption with feelings of disenchantment with American politics for the first time. They further argued that television (TV) broadcasts fueled public cynicism by over-emphasizing political conflict and downplaying routine policymaking (Norris, 2000). However, malaise's effect was not given much attention until Michael Robinson (1976) first coined the term video malaise to highlight the connection between a reliance upon American television journalism and feelings of political cynicism, social mistrust, and a lack of political efficacy. In his research, Robinson (1976) confirmed that the more time citizens spent watching TV, the further their political support sank. However, with regard to media use and its effect, particularly on support for the EU, past research confirms that media use can undermine political support for the EU, not in all, but at least in some member states (Van Aelst, 2017). At this point, it is important to mention that the current study also only focuses on the malaise effect of TV, thus the author uses the term "video" and "media" malaise interchangeably while referring only to its negative effect, which in essence is a decline in political support among those who use TV as a medium to get information about the EU.

In addition to media use, the effects of media content have also been analyzed by various scholars. Consequently, negative political news has been found to have a positive relationship with low levels of public confidence (Floss, 2008). For instance, Miller,

Goldenberg, and Erbing (1979) found that media criticism led to dissatisfaction with political leaders and policies. Along the same lines, several studies indicate that negative media content affects attitudes, particularly toward persons (Kepplinger H. , 2000; Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, & Oegema, 2006) but also toward institutions such as the presidency, the government (Patterson, 1996), and the EU, specifically (Trendz, 2008).

The counterargument to media malaise is also quite compelling. It claims that media is not associated with a malaise effect, but there is rather an opposite effect called “mobilization” (Newton 1999: 580). For instance, Norris (1996: 2000) argued in her studies that general TV watching is related to apathy; however, contrary to the media malaise hypothesis, attention to the news media was associated with positive indicators of civic engagement. Furthermore, Newton (1999) found that reading a broadsheet newspaper in Britain and watching a significant amount of television news was associated with greater political knowledge, interest, and understanding. Holtz-Bacha (1990) demonstrated similar patterns associated with attention to the news media in Germany, while Curtice, Schmitt-Beck and Schrott (1998) also reported positive findings towards media use and political knowledge. In an exhaustive study, Bennett et al. (1999) found that trust in politics and trust in the news media go hand-in-hand, with no evidence that use of the news media is related to political cynicism. Within the European context, scholars have found similar positive relationships between media use and variables such as political knowledge (Aarts & Semetko, 2003), political interest (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010), political participation (Schuck, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2016), and also political trust (Adriaansen, van Praag, & De Vreese, 2010).

In light of the given theoretical arguments for both the political support and effects of media on it, the following section now outlines the hypotheses for proposed empirical analysis.

5.3 Hypotheses

On the basis of the previously stated arguments construed from established theories, the current section outlines three hypotheses. The first hypothesis aims to descriptively show the impact of the Eurozone crisis on both diffuse and specific support for all three objects (i.e. political community, regime, and political authorities) among all member states. The assumption here is that political support, irrespective of its type, has declined after the crisis, and this fall is more noticeable among countries that were most affected by the crisis. The rationality for such an assumption stems from Easton's theory, according to which positive experiences with the current authorities of a political system lead to specific support for these authorities, and, over some time, generate diffuse support for the regime and political community (Easton, 1975; Weßels, 2007). On the contrary, negative experiences result in discontent and a lack of political support. Similarly, Weßels (2007) argues that a crisis with negative outcomes should cumulate and translate into lower political support toward the regime, political authorities, and also the withdrawal of identification with the political community in question. Therefore, in light of this argument, the first hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1: Due to the Eurozone crisis, political support in Europe has decreased, especially in those member states that were most affected by the crisis.

The second hypothesis deals with the ability of TV use for gathering information regarding EU affairs to affect the citizens' sense of their European identity. According to video malaise, when consuming information from the TV, people become more cynical toward the political system. In the case of the EU, research has convincingly shown that media coverage of the EU is more negative than it is positive (de Vreese et al., 2011; Michailidou & Trenz, 2014). Additionally, unlike other indicators of political support, a collective sense of identity in a political community develops over a longer period of time (Walkenhorst, 2008) and provides a buffer against the erosion of political support when there is a crisis (Weßels, 2007).

But, the current study assumes that despite being more resilient against a crisis, the Eurozone crisis, coupled with consistent negative coverage of the EU, negatively affected the EU citizens' sense of their European identity, consequently making people feel less attached to the respective political system particularly, and such an effect is more visible in the most affected countries. Therefore, the malaise hypothesis is stated as follows:

H2: The use of television as an information source has a negative effect on the citizens' European identity and this effect is stronger in the countries most affected by the Eurozone crisis.

As previously noted, the counterargument to video malaise is media mobilization (Newton, 1999), which asserts that media use is not associated with negative but positive attitudes toward political institutions. Hence, the final hypothesis posits that people usually get their information and news about political institutions from the media, and this improves their level of information while making them more aware, subsequently empowering them to support a given political structure on the basis of acquired information. Hence, the following third hypothesis proposes that increased perception of being informed increases collective European identity:

H3: Subjective assessment of being informed about the EU has a positive effect on an individual's European identity.

To analyze these hypotheses, a secondary data analysis is conducted. The following section outlines the designs of each study and the operationalization of the corresponding data.

5.4 Design of the Study

The empirical analysis of the study is also based on secondary data obtained from two different Eurobarometer surveys (65.2, 80.1): One was conducted in 2006 (before the Eurozone crisis) and the other in 2013 (after the crisis). The reasons behind choosing the specific time periods are, firstly, to determine the effects of the economic crisis and the media on political support

before and after the crisis, and secondly, the availability of relevant variables. Ideally, the Eurobarometer survey conducted just before the Euro crisis (2008 or 2009) would have been perfect to use for the study, but the absence of the required variables forced the researcher to select the data obtained from the 2006 Eurobarometer survey. As for after the crisis, different studies point to 2013 as a turning point for the Eurozone crisis, after which the economic indicators started to show positive trends (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014). Hence, the current study uses the data released in November 2013 to analyze post-crisis public opinion.

As noted, this study classifies EU member states depending on how hard they were hit by the Eurozone crisis. To undertake the categorization, the author has used the real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate volume as the basis for classifying different member states. The calculation of the annual growth rate in GDP volume is intended to allow for comparisons of the dynamics of economic development both over time and between economies of different sizes (Eurostat, 2017). Since the literature points to different EU member states being affected differently by the Eurozone crisis of 2010–13 (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014; Schäfer & Weber, 2014), it therefore makes sense to categorize countries into separate groups on the basis of their respective GDP growth rate between 2010 and 2013. Thus, to classify EU member states into two groups (i.e. the least and most affected), the author has calculated the average GDP growth of each member state between 2010 and 2013 (see the Appendix A for more details).

The classification based on the GDP growth rate groups Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia among the most affected EU member states, whereas all the other countries were relatively less affected. It is important to note here that Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia became EU members in 2008 and 2013, respectively, so they are not included in the current analysis. In the following section, the author details the operationalization of each variable.

5.5 Operationalization of the Variables

5.5.1 Dependent Variable

Due to the unavailability of corresponding question in respective surveys, the dependent variable in this study utilizes only the affective dimension of European identity and operationalized it through the following question: “Please tell me how attached do you feel to the Europe/European Union?” using a scale from 1 (not attached at all) to 4 (very attached). This question aligns with the concept of affective attachments of individuals to the collective, and the same question has been used in several studies (Bruter, 2005; Fuchs, 2011; Schäfer & Weber, 2014) to assess European identity.

5.5.2 Independent Variables

The independent media variable in this study is operationalized using the following question: “When you are looking for information about the European Union, its policies, its institutions, which of the following sources do you use? (1) Meetings; (2) Discussions with relatives, friends, colleagues; (3) Daily newspapers; (4) Other newspapers, magazines; (5) Television; (6) Radio; (7) The Internet; (8) Books, brochures, information leaflets; (9) Other; and (10) Never look for such information, not interested.” The respondents were asked to choose from among multiple media sources, but the study included only those respondents who selected “Television” as an information source for European political matters. This is because the current study only investigates the “video malaise” effect that is associated with TV, and also most respondents selected TV as their main source of information. Additionally, scholars have not found compelling evidence to suggest that print media invoke political cynicism (Newton, 1999; Norris, 1996).

The second independent variable used to assess mobilization effect of media on the European identity is operationalized through the following question: “To what extent do you

think that you are informed or not about European matters?” The respondents were asked to evaluate their level of information according to a 4-point scale: 4 (very well informed), 3 (fairly well informed), 2 (not very well informed), and 1 (not at all informed). It is important to highlight the rationale behind testing the media mobilization hypothesis through this question. It is clear that the question itself does not point to any role for the media in terms of acquiring information about the EU, so one may not be sure about the adequacy of the item in terms of operationalizing the media mobilization effect. However, though the author concedes that availability of a better and direct measure of media use for European matters in both surveys would have been beneficial. Nevertheless, he defends the use of said indicator by arguing that because people do not have direct experience with distant and abstract political structures (Page & Shapiro, 1992), therefore they rely on the information they acquire through the media particularly TV (Shaikh, 2017). This reliance on media regarding the information about the EU has been confirmed by previous studies (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016; Rittberger & Maier, 2008; Norris, 2000). Hence it can be reasoned that if people perceive they are informed about European affairs it must be through media. Therefore, the said measure makes sense to be used for the operationalization of the media mobilization effect.

Two additional indicators, democracy and trust are used to operationalize the diffuse support for regime. The predictor democracy is operationalized through the question: “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the EU?” Answers were assessed based on a 4-point scale: 1 (not at all satisfied) 2 (not very satisfied), 3 (fairly satisfied), 4 (very satisfied). The second predictor trust is operationalized through the question, “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in the European Union?”, please tell me if 1 (you tend not to trust) or 2 (tend to trust it). Since, both constructs are indicators of particular political object i.e. regime, subsequently are highly correlated (between $r = .43$ and $r = .44$). Therefore, in order to avoid the issue of multicollinearity, the researcher has created an index by

computing the mean of both trust and democracy variables (where high value reflected more and low signifies less trust and satisfaction with democracy in the EU).

Finally, to measure the specific support for political authorities, questions about the national and European economies are used: “How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? a) The situation of the national economy. b) The situation of the European economy.” The options were 1 (very bad), 2 (rather bad), 3 (rather good), and 4 (very good).

Apart from the respective independent and dependent variables, the analysis also used gender, age, and level of education as control variables. In light of the above-mentioned concepts and operationalization of the variables, the following section presents the data analysis.

5.6 Findings

In this section, the author outlines the results and discusses the key insights obtained from the data analysis. As for the first hypothesis, it is assumed that the crisis prompted a decline in political support throughout the EU, but it is most noticeable in those countries that were hit the hardest by the crisis. Figure 5.1 shows the percentage of all political support indicators across all member states. The result confirms a significant drop in both diffuse and specific support all across the Union. The most noticeable decline can be seen in the evaluation of the European economy, and it makes sense because during the crisis, the EU and its institutions were consistently held responsible for the policies that led the continent into recession (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014).

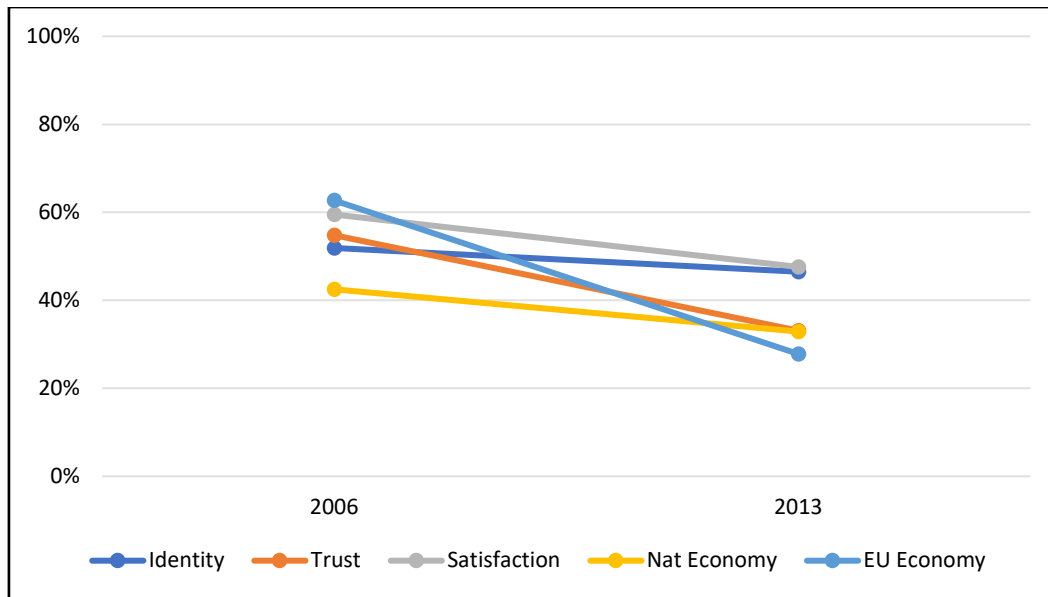


Figure 5.1 Political support across the all EU member states

Source: Own calculation based on Eurobarometer surveys (EB 65.2 and EB 80.1).

Note: The quantities are population-weighted averages, only positive evaluations are used, and “don’t know” answers are excluded.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 present a comparative picture of political support in the least and most affected EU member states. Figure 5.2 shows that except for trust, other diffuse political support indicators in the least affected countries remained unchanged, whereas specific support indicators related to the national and EU economies both declined significantly. The stable percentage for the diffuse support indicators in 2006 and 2013 highlights the resilient nature of feeling attached to and satisfied with democracy. This proves the ability of diffuse support to provide a buffer against the widespread erosion of political support (Weßels, 2007).

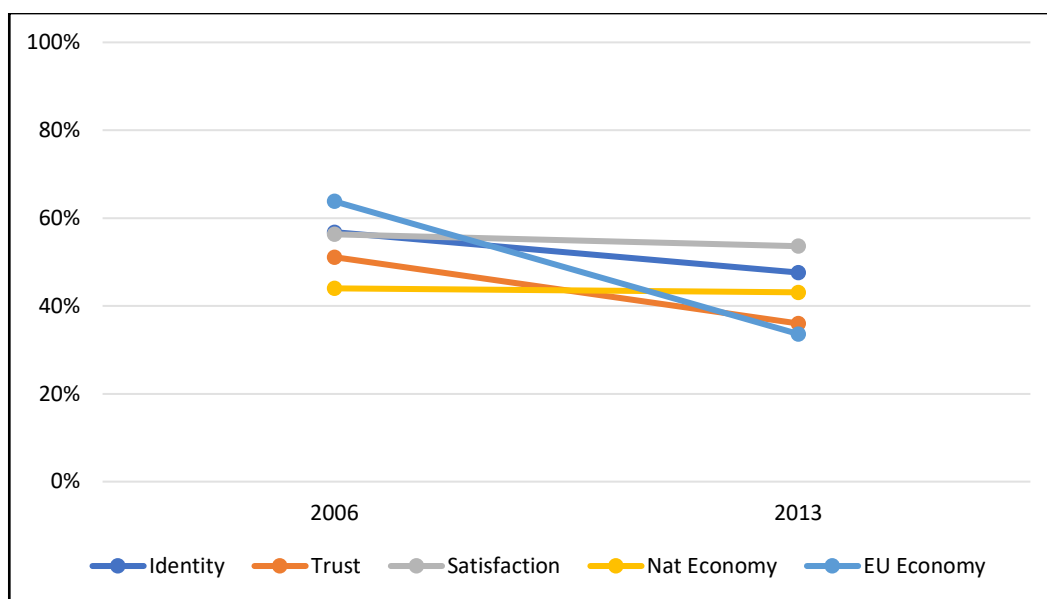


Figure 5.2 Political support in the least affected EU member states

Source: Own calculation based on Eurobarometer surveys (EB 65.2 and EB 80.1).

Note: The quantities are population-weighted averages, only positive evaluations are used, and “don’t know” answers are excluded.

Public opinion on the political support indicators in the most affected countries is quite different from that in the least affected countries. Figure 5.3 shows that all five indicators of both specific and diffuse support declined significantly between 2006 and 2013. It is also noticeable that the feeling of identity did not tank as much as the other support indicators did. It shows that economic benefits are of some importance, but they are not the sole reason for people feeling attached to their respective political community, because even in the harsh economic conditions, people in the most affected countries did not lose much of their EU sense of identity.

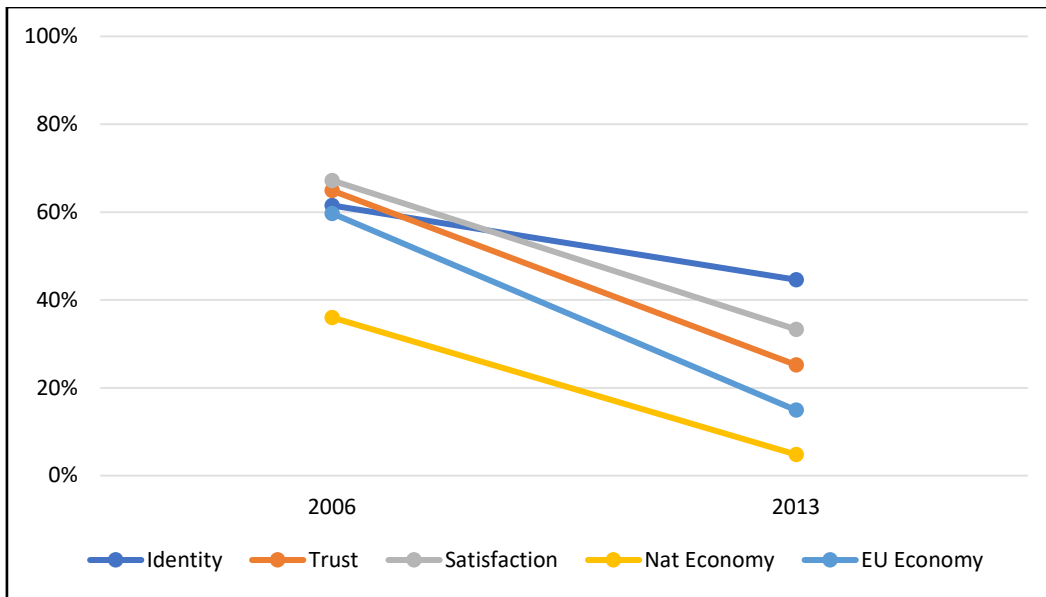


Figure 5.3 Political Support in the most affected EU member states

Source: Own calculation based on Eurobarometer surveys (EB 65.2 and EB 80.1).

Note: The quantities are population-weighted averages, only positive evaluations are used, and “don’t know” answers are excluded.

To test the remaining two hypotheses and see if information consumption via TV played any role in affecting people’s sense of their European identity before and after the crisis, a hierarchal linear regression (HLR) was conducted. The reason behind using the HLR is that it tests the effect of each set of variables independently. The following table shows four different blocks, where the variables that are similar to a single concept are nested in each block. This allows the author to infer how the relationship between a group of independent and dependent variables varies. The results of the analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 5.2: Hierarchal regression analysis

Variable	2006		2013	
Block 1	Least Affected	Most Affected	Least Affected	Most Affected
	(β)	(β)	(β)	(β)
Age	-.01	.02	.04***	.00
Education	.08***	.11***	.18***	.15***
Gender	-.02	-.03**	-.05***	-.01
ΔR^2	.01	.01	.03	.02
Block 2				
Satisfaction with Democracy & Trust in the EU	.44***	.44***	.40***	.36***
ΔR^2	.19	.19	.16	.13
Block 3				
Evaluation of the National Economy	-.02*	.08***	.12***	.06***
Evaluation of the EU Economy	.14***	.10***	.06***	.06***
ΔR^2	.01	.02	.02	.01
Block 4				
Information about the EU via TV	.06***	.00	.06***	.05***
Information Level about the EU	.08***	.11***	.19***	.13***
ΔR^2	.01	.01	.04	.02
Total R^2	.22	.24	.25	.18
N	13991	5509	13559	5778

Note: The quantities are population-weighted averages; Standardized regression coefficients are reported, and the p-value significance varies: * < 0.1; ** < 0.05; *** < 0.01

Table 5.2 offers number of key insights. The first block in the table presents the relationship between the covariates (i.e. age, gender, and level of education) and the citizens' sense of their European identity. The regression coefficients reveal a similar trend across time and for both groups of members. Education is positively associated with a sense of European

identity, whereas women in the least affected countries do not feel attached as much as men do. The second block introduces satisfaction with democracy and trust in the EU – as a single variable signifying diffuse support related to the regime – and emerged to have a strong positive relationship with the citizens' European identity. The trend does not change between the two different time periods and among both groups of members.

In the third block, specific support indicators are inducted which slightly change the R^2 , which offer the insight that after the Eurozone crisis, the evaluation of national economies in the least affected countries became an important positive predictor of European identity. On the other hand, the evaluation of the EU economy remained a positive predictor of European identity both before and after the crisis. However, before the crisis, the evaluation of a European identity was a relatively better predictor of identity in both groups of member states, whereas after the crisis, its ability to explain the variance of the dependent variable was weakened. This indicates that overtime people who feel attached to the EU do not necessarily attribute their sense of belonging to its economic benefits.

The fourth block in the table shows the impact of television use for gathering information regarding the EU and the respondent's level of information about the EU on the citizens' European identity. The second hypothesis on video malaise assumes that there should be a negative relationship between using the television as a source of information and people's sense of their European identity, and that this relationship should be more obvious in the most affected countries. However, the results show that there is no negative relationship between getting EU-related information from the television and a European identity in both least and most affected member states which goes against the above-mentioned assumption. As far as the respondent's level of information regarding the EU is concerned, the results reveal that it is a positive significant predictor of a European identity, irrespective of the time and country. It is also important to note that the respondents' assessment regarding their information about

the EU is a better predictor of a European identity than the economic perception indicators of specific support.

5.7 Discussion and Limitations

There are a number of key takeaways from the findings of this study. In the result of descriptive analysis, what is foremost is the indisputable fact that the Eurozone crisis did affect the political support of Europeans for the EU, and the most affected countries witnessed a significant decline in both specific and diffuse support, hence it confirms the first hypothesis. With regard to the citizens' sense of their European identity, the results show that it did not dramatically decline in the wake of the crisis. As a matter of fact, it remained almost similar in the least affected countries, whereas in the most affected countries, it reduced by 15% between 2006 and 2013. This drop is far smaller than the decline in any other political support indicator. According to these results, one can infer that people's sense of their European identity neither wanes over a short period of time nor because of the economic crisis. This interpretation also falls in line with the buffer hypothesis presented by Weßels (2007), according to which "identification with the political community creates a buffer" (p. 290) against any crisis or political skepticism.

The main crux of this study was to understand the video malaise and media mobilization effects on people's sense of their European identity. In line with the video malaise hypothesis, it is expected that using the television to seek out information regarding the EU would have a negative effect on the citizens' European identity. This assumption stems from various research results that reveal the tendency of the media to evaluate the EU more negatively than positively (Carey & Burton, 2004; Daddow, 2012; Galpin & Trenz, 2016; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Therefore, if the media usually portray the EU negatively, such coverage should increase especially amidst a crisis, and the likelihood of people coming across such coverage results in amplifying the negative effect on the citizens' European identity, hence, it is logical to expect

a malaise effect, especially in the most affected countries. However, the results do not confirm this assumption presented in the second hypothesis.

Firstly, in the case of the least affected countries, the given assumption has been rejected because the findings reveal that consuming information from the television has not been found to have a negative effect on the citizens' European identity, in fact, the effects are significant and positive. The picture is also similar in the case of the most affected countries, with the exception in 2006 when the results appear to fall in line with the assumption yet remain statistically insignificant.

These findings allow the researcher to speculate that information consumption via the television is not associated with a generalized malaise effect; moreover, such an effect, if it does appear in some cases, is rather inconsistent, and finally, it does not amplify because of the crisis. One explanation for those results is that a European identity as an indicator of diffuse political support is resilient to temporal circumstances and perhaps changes when the crisis is rather more widespread. These results from the current investigation and the interpretation correspond to numerous past research studies conducted in different contexts but that reached similar conclusions (see e.g., Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Newton, 1999; Norris, 2000; Pinkleton & Austin, 2002; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010).

As for the mobilization effect, the findings confirm the third hypothesis which postulates that people get information regarding different political structures and issues from the media, that, in turn, increases their level of political information, and this informed-ness proves to be a better predictor of their identity. Thus, media consumption in general and television in the present case can be attributed as having a positive effect on the citizens' European identity. Furthermore, the media mobilization effect does not change rather increases in strength in the wake of a crisis showing the importance of television for consuming political information.

In the present study, a secondary data analysis was undertaken, which has its own typical problems. One limitation is that identity is a dynamic and flexible concept, but the operationalization is confined due to the availability of only one variable that could be deemed to be imperfect for measuring identity (Bruter, 2008). However, owing to the fact that such an operationalization is commonly used in empirical analyses on citizens' European identity (Westle, 2012), the author considers attachment as an appropriate indicator to measure the European identity. It also falls in line with social psychology theories that consider affective attachment as a key indicator of a collective identity (Tajfel, 1981). Despite the appropriateness of the indicator that was employed, multiple pointers – as highlighted in the Chapter 2 – should be used to estimate identity (e.g. the cognitive and utilitarian dimensions of one's identity can provide some useful indicators).

Furthermore, the operationalization adopted to examine the video malaise effect might be considered questionable, because malaise is associated not only with using the television as a source of information but also with the nature of the content. This highlights the need for data that are based on a specific media content analysis and public opinion on that content, and future studies should take this into consideration. Similarly, the mobilization effect indicator that was used could also be argued to be inapt. However, the author defends the use of this indicator by arguing that people get information regarding political issues from the media. Consequently, their informed-ness is brought about via their media consumption and that is the media mobilization effect.

In conclusion, the author argues that this study fills the gap by adding to the literature on the effects of using the television for political information on political support, particularly in the context of the Euro crisis. The findings confirm that television use does not lead to political cynicism and a decline in political support, but it instead makes people more informed about different political structures and issues. Furthermore, it also rejects the notion that

people's sense of their European identity can only be explained through a cost–benefit calculus. On the contrary, it is embedded among Europeans on more abstract levels and serves as a buffer in times of political turmoil.

5.8 Annex

Table 5.3: Real GDP growth rate - volume

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013	Average
Belgium	2.7	1.8	0.1	−0.1	1.13
Czech Republic	2.3	2	−0.8	−0.5	0.75
Denmark	1.9	1.3	0.2	0.9	1.08
Germany	4.1	3.7	0.5	0.5	2.20
Estonia	2.3	7.6	4.3	1.4	3.90
Ireland	2	0	−1.1	1.1	0.50
Greece	−5.5	−9.1	−7.3	−3.2	−6.28
Spain	0	−1	−2.9	−1.7	−1.40
France	2	2.1	0.2	0.6	1.23
Italy	1.7	0.6	−2.8	−1.7	−0.55
Cyprus	1.3	0.3	−3.2	−6	−1.90
Latvia	−3.8	6.4	4	2.6	2.30
Lithuania	1.6	6	3.8	3.5	3.73
Luxembourg	4.9	2.5	−0.4	4	2.75
Hungary	0.7	1.7	−1.6	2.1	0.73
Malta	3.5	1.3	2.5	4.6	2.98
Netherlands	1.4	1.7	−1.1	−0.2	0.45
Austria	1.9	2.8	0.7	0.1	1.38
Poland	3.6	5	1.6	1.4	2.90
Portugal	1.9	−1.8	−4	−1.1	−1.25
Slovenia	1.2	0.6	−2.7	−1.1	−0.50
Slovakia	5	2.8	1.7	1.5	2.75
Finland	3	2.6	−1.4	−0.8	0.85
Sweden	6	2.7	−0.3	1.2	2.40
United Kingdom	1.9	1.5	1.3	1.9	1.65

6. Traditional and online media: Relationship between media preference, credibility perceptions, predispositions and European identity

6.1 Introduction

The present chapter broadens the scope of the discussion by following a comparative approach and investigates the impact of selecting traditional or online media for news consumption on people's sense of European identity. So far, the scholarship discussed in the previous chapters has established that media usage, particularly news, affects political attitudes, including European identity, which corresponds to the sense of personal identification with Europe and with the EU as the institutional embodiment of European norms, values, and beliefs (Gvozden, 2008, p. 9).

Although a large body of research confirms that the exposure to traditional mass media influences political attitudes towards the EU, only a few studies have analyzed the potential of online news media to affect public support for the EU (see, for exceptions, Conti & Memoli, 2016; Mourao et al., 2015), and even fewer have examined its impact on European identity (for exceptions, see Hillje, 2013; Borz, Brandenburg, & Mendez, 2018). This research gap is particularly surprising considering that in 2017, 39% of people (an increase of 2% from previous year) across Europe relied on the Internet (online)—websites and online social networks—as their primary means to obtain news about European political matters, and among them, 14% received news about European politics through their social networks (European

Commission, 2018). This significant use of online sources for political news demands further research to determine its impact on users compared to that of traditional media. Therefore, one goal of the current paper is to address this research gap by comparing the direct impacts of people's preferences for traditional or online media as news sources, particularly with regard to European identity.

In addition to the stream of research that documents the effects of the news media on the public, another significant strand of communication science literature emphasizes the central role of media credibility (Ladd, 2011). According to scholars, media credibility is a theoretical construct that includes but is not limited to the audience's trust in media and their perception of its objectivity (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Meyer, 1988). Previous studies have not only found a positive and modest association between media use and its credibility (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Kioussis, 2001) but also shown that source credibility serves as an important moderator of media effects (Ladd, 2011). For example, in an experimental setting, Miller and Krosnick (2000) found that newspaper priming does not occur among those who do not find media credible and trustworthy. Similarly, Tsfati (2002) showed that distrust in media moderates agenda setting and spiral-of-silence processes. Consequently, the research on this subject warrants the inclusion of media credibility when assessing the effects of media use on its consumers.

Here, it is important to mention that despite significant empirical evidence, the literature examining media effects on attitudes towards the EU has not exhaustively examined the interplay between media credibility, news, and public perception of the EU simultaneously. Instead, studies have focused on either news media exposure or trust in media when explaining different political attitudes towards the EU (see, e.g., Mourao et al., 2015; Ceron & Memoli, 2015; Brosius, van Elsas, & de Vreese, 2018). As a result, the author has not come across an empirical study that investigates the relationship between the preference for traditional/online

media for news consumption and credibility in general in political attitudes towards the EU, particularly in terms of European identity. Thus, in light of this research gap and the results of previous studies, the author aims to investigate not only the direct effects of selecting traditional/online news media but also the moderating effects of perceptions of its credibility on people's sense of European identity.

Besides investigating the direct and moderating effects of news media and subjective media credibility, the study further adds citizens' political predispositions to the model. The rationale to include these predispositions in the analysis stems from recent empirical evidence suggesting that people's selection of certain media sources in the present-day news environment is driven by their previously held beliefs and expectations (Stroud, 2017; Ceron & Memoli, 2015; Newman, Nisbet, & Nisbet 2018). Thus, individual values and dispositions trigger cognitive media selection, and together both either reinforce or dampen the effects of news on political attitudes (Stroud, 2008). So, keeping in mind the importance of individual beliefs that has been confirmed by previous studies and the scope of the current paper, the author intends to assess the integrated effect of predispositions, news media preference, and the perception of its credibility on people's sense of European identity.

In light of the arguments presented above, it can be inferred that the four main concepts of this study—selection or preference of certain media for news consumption, credibility perceptions of media, political predispositions, and sense of European identity, which is deemed part of an individual's political attitude—are thus interrelated. Therefore, this study essentially represents an effort to examine the relationship among these concepts by investigating the moderating role played by subjective media evaluation on the relationship between traditional and online news preference and European identity while simultaneously examining the variation in this interaction effect in the presence of certain political predispositions. In the pursuit of these aims, the author questions: How does (a) the subjective

perception of media credibility moderate the relationship between the preference for traditional/online news media and European identity, and (b) how do political predispositions affect this interaction?

Before answering the above research questions, the following section underpins the theoretical considerations concerning the effects of traditional and online news media usage on political attitudes, particularly on people's sense of European identity, and states the hypotheses. As for conceptualizing European identity, in this chapter, the author has utilized both cognitive (*identification as European*) and affective (*identification with EU*) dimensions of collective identities. Because the conceptualization of European identity has already been presented in detail (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation), the author does not discuss it again in this chapter while adopting the same framework. In addition to theoretical deliberation, the section also highlights the significance of political predispositions for the interplay between news, credibility, and sense of identity. Afterward, the paper presents the operationalization of different variables and the results of the empirical analysis. In the last section, the paper concludes by discussing the key findings and limitations of the study.

6.2 Theory and hypotheses

6.2.1 Traditional vs. online: Effects of political news consumption

While discussing the effects of media on political attitudes towards the EU, the author has presented numerous studies showing the influence of media on people's sense of European identity. At the same time, he has also argued that research attention has largely been focused on examining the use of traditional news media and its effects on European identity. In today's diverse media environment, people are no longer restricted to using only traditional media. Indeed, studies show that, in recent years, the number of people who use online media for news

consumption has been increasing consistently (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018).

This increase in the use of online news media can be attributed to the advent of the Internet and its inherent differences from traditional media in terms of its content style and delivery mechanism for political information (Conti & Memoli, 2016). Additionally, it allows users to not only passively consume the news but also actively select and interact with the news source (Bobok, 2016). Owing to these differences between the two forms of media, one can argue that online news media affects users' political opinion and attitudes differently than traditional media. This notion of differential effects regarding traditional and online news media is also supported by research, which shows that citizens' use and preference for different media outlets is related to their varying levels of interest in politics, political trust, and voting behavior (Avery, 2009; Bailard, 2012; Meeds, 2015; van Spanje & de Vreese, 2014). Considering these arguments and the mandate of the current study, it is plausible for the author to posit that because traditional and online media are intrinsically different and have varying effects on general political attitudes, their effects on specific attitudes linked with the EU may also vary.

Insofar as the effects of traditional news media on political attitudes are concerned, researchers generally agree, with only a few exceptions (e.g., Alarcón, 2010; Kepplinger & Glaab, 2007), that traditional media when presents the EU in positive tone it increases support for the EU (Nardis, 2015; Conti & Memoli, 2016). Further, the research shows that these positive assessments of the EU by traditional media lead citizens to develop positive attitudes towards the EU (Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & De Vreese, 2008). A number of different studies have produced similar results and argued that news consumption from traditional media, particularly via newspapers and TV, neither frame the EU as a threat nor prompt anti-EU attitudes (e.g., Conti & Memoli, 2016; Schuck, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese,

2016). Accordingly, following this line of argument, the author posits that a citizen's sense of collective European identity corresponds to his or her pro-EU attitude (Gvozden, 2008). The literature attests that the traditional media promotes a positive image of the EU, which causes people support to support the EU. Consequently, the researcher puts forward the following hypothesis:

H1: The preference of traditional media for political news consumption is positively associated with European identity.

However, with regard to online news consumption, the literature has found that it has varying effects on citizens' political attitudes (Mourao et al., 2015; Diehl, Weeks, & Zúñiga, 2015; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014). However, the literature is still inconclusive when it comes to determining the nature of those effects (Rothmund & Otto, 2015). This ambiguity arises from the contradictory results of different studies based on, for example, the design of the study (Boulianne, 2015). For instance, Ceron (2015), employing content analysis and survey data, found that consuming news from online media, especially social media, negatively affects the user by promoting distrust for political institutions. Conversely, Bailard (2012) conducted a field experiment and revealed that online media users are more satisfied with democracy than nonusers. In contrast to both studies, Avery (2009) found no differences in the level of trust in government between citizens exposed to online campaign news compared to other sources.

Notwithstanding the contradictory results from various studies, it is clear that the use of online media has grown enormously in last two decades, increasing its capacity to influence the political discourse (Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010) as well as the way citizens learn about politics (Xenos & Moy, 2007). However, online political communication is often criticized for spreading hostile messages and inflammatory rhetoric (Lampe, Zube, Lee, Park, & Johnston, 2014). The prevalent online incivility and tendency to intensify political

disagreements have led scholars to become more skeptical of the role of online media and its potential to have a positive effect on the culture and consumer of online political discourse (Conti & Memoli, 2016).

While the research concerning online news and political attitudes toward the EU is scarce, the few studies that have looked into the topic have documented a negative bias regarding EU news in the online media (Michailidou, Trenz, & de Wilde, 2014; Galpin & Trenz, 2016). In addition to this news bias, Pavan and Caiani (2017) demonstrated that groups supporting the extreme right ideology and anti-EU rhetoric mobilize particularly well online by developing linked networks, which in turn allows them to influence the public through Eurosceptic rhetoric. Moreover, a content analysis of data from online news platforms and political blogs in 12 EU Member States showed the prevalence of Eurosceptic and negative evaluations (de Wilde, Michailidou, & Trenz, 2014). Similarly, de Wilde et al. (2013) concluded that online media act as a platform for people to be critical about the achievements and performance of the EU, consequently promoting and projecting anti-EU attitudes among citizens. Thus, in light of these empirical findings and the context of the current study, the author also assumes a negative association between online news media usage and European identity, which leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: The preference of online media for political news consumption is negatively associated with European identity.

6.2.2 Media credibility and political predispositions

The literature has already established that media use and exposure affect audiences' opinions, attitudes, and behaviors under different circumstances (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016; Silke, 2009; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Diehl, Weeks, & Zúñiga, 2015). However, scholars have recently shifted from merely detecting media effects to also examining the role of contextual factors that influence the impact of media effects (e.g., Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Fletcher & Park,

2017; Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker, & Zúñiga, 2017). The reason for this shift is the growing evidence showing that the effects of media can be “enhanced, diminished, or even blocked through the influence of some factors, suggestively called moderators” (Buturoiu & Corbu, 2015, p. 157).

Accordingly, among different moderators, media research demonstrates that an audience’s assessment of media credibility (i.e., its trust in the media and perception of its objectivity) is a highly consequential factor that affects the ability of media to influence its users, and a lack of it prompts them to seek alternative news sources (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Ladd, 2011). Moreover, the importance of user perceptions of media credibility is not limited only to media selection and exposure. Scholars have argued that people’s subjective assessment of media credibility (or the lack thereof) is also a major factor contributing to citizens’ trust in democracy (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005), political participation, and partisan voting choice (Ladd, 2011). Hence, one can infer that the credibility of media not only shapes people’s selection of media but also moderates their political attitudes.

Despite the importance of media credibility, Tsfati and Ariely (2014, p. 760) argued that the understanding of the relationships of media credibility with other relevant factors is limited because few studies have implemented a “correlational design,” and of those that have, most originated in the US. Insofar as the literature on the effects of media on the EU is concerned, the author did not find any studies investigating the direct effects of media preference for news consumption and subjective perception of media credibility along with their interaction effect specifically on people’s sense of European identity. Therefore, the number of possible interactions—news media preference and credibility in traditional/online media with European identity—and the scarcity of empirical research in this area make it difficult to predict the direct impact of credibility perception and the direction of its interactions (if any) along with news media selection on European identity. Considering this gap regarding

the direct and moderating effects of subjective media credibility on European identity in the literature, the author poses the following research questions:

RQ1. How do the subjective credibility perceptions of (a) traditional and (b) online media influence European identity?

RQ2. Do subjective credibility perceptions of (a) traditional and (b) online media moderate the relationship between the preference of traditional/online media for news consumption and European identity?

In addition to the credibility of media, research has shown that people's predispositions are also important in investigating the effects of media on political attitudes. The reason to consider predispositions as relevant is the fact that they cause people to select and consume specific media that align with their preconceived notions (Stroud, 2017; Ceron & Memoli, 2015). Consequently, the pre-existing beliefs prompt people to selectively expose themselves to a particular type of media and content, which in turn influence their opinion and attitude formation (Newman, Nisbet, & Nisbet, 2018; Stroud, 2008). Over the years, the literature on this subject has not only confirmed the relationship between previously held beliefs and people's preference for selective media (Stroud, 2008; Hansen, 2007; Brossard, 2013) but also demonstrated the ability of pre-existing opinions to moderate the effects of media on various political attitudes, including climate change opinions (Newman, Nisbet, & Nisbet, 2018), trust in government (Ceron & Memoli, 2015), and voting intentions (Schemer, Wirth, & Matthes, 2011).

Similarly, the literature regarding the effects of media on public opinions related to the EU has also argued for the importance of individual beliefs and views in predicting support for the EU (see, e.g., Curtis & Nielsen, 2018; Hobolt, 2006). For example, Goodwin, Hix, and Pickup (2018) concluded that media coverage of the EU consistent with British people's prior beliefs, particularly their political affiliations—Labour or Conservative—leads to stronger

framing effects. In the same vein, de Vreese and Kandyla (2009) revealed that the effects of framing the common EU foreign and security policy (CFSP) as a risk or as an opportunity are not unconditional; rather, they are moderated by individual predispositions.

Furthermore, in their recent study, Baccini, Sudulich, and Wall (2016) concluded that predispositions together with primary consumption of news from online media sources have reinforcement effects on people's attitudes towards the EU. In essence, they have showed that people who hold negative opinions toward the EU are more susceptible to negative news, which in turn reinforces their Eurosceptic predispositions. Likewise, several studies have confirmed the reinforcement effects of both predispositions and news media consumption on different political attitudes (see, e.g., Hansen, 2007; Schemer, Wirth, & Matthes, 2011; Hobolt, Tilley, & Wittrock, 2013). Further, with regard to European identity, researchers have found sufficient evidence suggesting that pre-existing opinions can also explain people's sense of European identity (Bergbauer, 2018). However, based on the author's knowledge, no studies have explored the interplay of political predispositions and the effect of news consumption via online and traditional media on European identity.

Considering the aforementioned strands of literature, the author summarizes that (a) predispositions are consequential in explaining public opinions, (b) preexisting beliefs prompt selective media exposure which effect political attitudes (Goodwin, Hix, & Pickup, 2018), and (c) predispositions have a reinforcing effect, that is, people with negative (positive) viewpoints use media aligned with their beliefs, which in turn strengthen their negative (positive) views on a certain political issue. In line with these arguments and the highlighted gap in research, the author first acknowledges the importance of pre-existing attitudes in explaining and moderating the effects of media on European identity. Second, following the research that indicates that predispositions reinforce media effects (Baccini, Sudulich, & Wall, 2016), the author anticipates that people who are either positively or negatively predisposed toward the

EU are susceptible to the effects of media differently and in accordance to their predispositions.

Thus, in light of this discussion, the researcher presents the following hypothesis:

H3: For both (a) traditional and (b) online media, positive/negative political predispositions reinforce the direct and moderating effects of media on European identity.

In sum, the arguments presented in this section provide sufficient reasons for the author to investigate (1) the direct effects of media credibility and the preference of traditional or online media for news consumption, (2) the interaction effects of subjective perceptions of media credibility and media preference, and (3) the reinforcement effects of political predispositions on the direct and moderated effects of media on European identity (see Figure 6.1). To answer the research questions and validate the hypotheses, the author in the following section explains the operationalization of the data and the results of the empirical analysis.

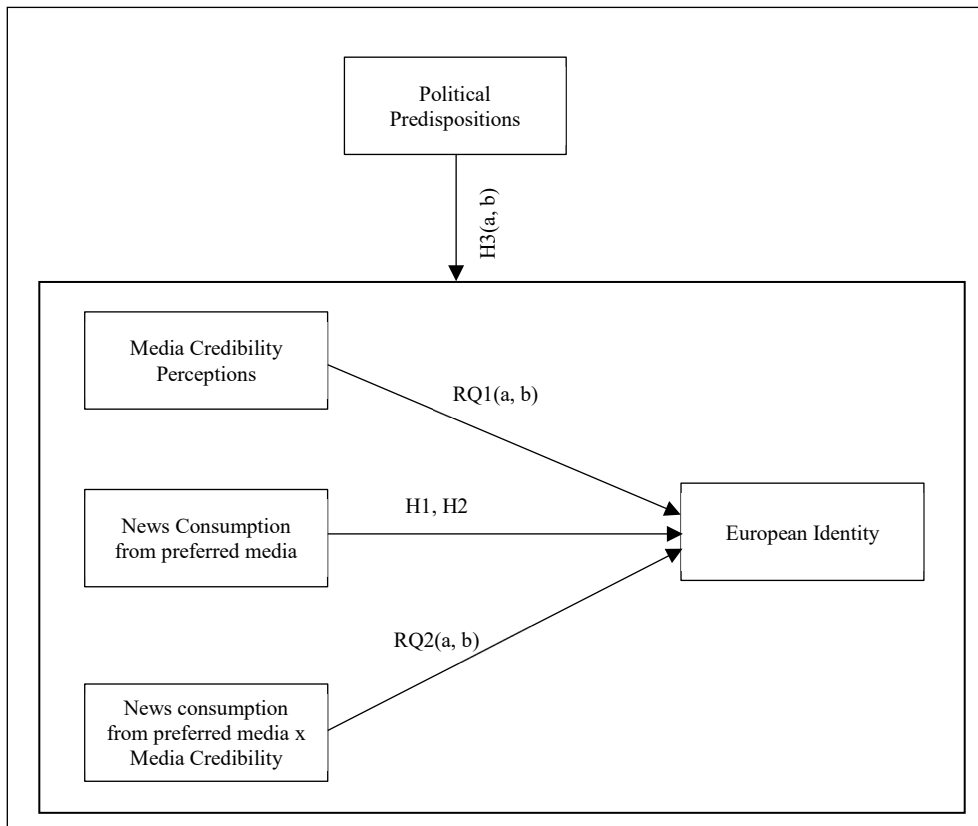


Figure 6.1 A statistical presentation of the conceptual variable model

6.3 Method

To examine the above hypotheses and research questions, the author has used data gathered through the EC's Standard Eurobarometer 88.3 survey from 2017. This survey was selected because it offers recent data regarding European public opinion, and it contains all the relevant variables required for the present empirical analysis. In the following, the author explicates the operationalization of those relevant variables.

6.3.1 Variables of interest

European identity: The author utilized two questions from the Eurobarometer survey to operationalize the dependent variable (identity). First, the respondents were asked to answer the following question (QD1a): "Please tell me how attached you feel to the European Union" using a scale from 1 (not attached at all) to 4 (very attached). The second question (QD2) asked, "Do you feel you are a citizen of the EU?" The participants were instructed to indicate the extent to which the item corresponded to their own opinion. Possible answers were 1 (no, definitely not), 2 (no, not really), 3 (yes, to some extent), and 4 (yes, definitely). The two items were highly correlated ($r = .67$). Thus, the author used both to build an index and measure European identity. Based on the index, the mean level of European identity was about 2.74 ($N=27920$, $SD = 0.824$), and in all countries, the mean value ranged between 2.3 and 3.2. However, there were some differences in the level of European identity between the countries. The negative outliers were Greece (2.3), Great Britain (2.4), and the Czech Republic (2.4), while the positive exceptions were Luxembourg (3.2), Spain (3.1), and Germany (3.0).

Preference of new consumption via traditional/online media: The independent variable concerning the preference of political news consumption from traditional or online media was operationalized through the following question: "Where do you get most of your news on European political matters? First? And then?" The possible answers were as follows:

Television, the press, radio, websites, and online social networks. The author used the sum of two variables for each medium and then based on the mean values of television, press, and radio obtained one variable ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 0.297$) indicating the preference of news consumption through traditional media as either the first or second news source. Similarly, the mean use of websites and online social networks yielded the second variable ($M = 1.23$; $SD = 0.322$), which indicates online media usage for European political news consumption. Furthermore, the correlation ($r = -.23$, $p < .000$) between the two variables confirmed that both variables could be used as separate measures for the respective constructs.

Subjective media credibility: To operationalize the subjective media credibility perceptions as the moderating variable, the author used two indicators: general trust in the media and assessment of the objectivity of the EU-related content. Regarding trust in the media, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they tend not to trust (1) or tend to trust (2) each of the following media sources: Television, the press, radio, the Internet, and online social networks. Owing to the high correlation of trust with television, press, and radio (between $r = .53$ and $r = .61$), along with an appropriate score on the reliability scale ($\text{Alpha} = 0.81$), the three variables were computed as a single variable ($M = 1.55$; $SD = 0.35$) reflecting trust in traditional media on a scale from 1 to 2. Similarly, the correlation ($r = .60$) between trust in the Internet and social network prompted the author to build an index and transform both variables into a single variable ($M = 1.33$; $SD = 0.42$) representing trust in online media.

The second indicator of subjective perceptions of media credibility was measured through the following question: “Do you think that the [national] television present(s) the EU too positively, objectively, or too negatively?” The same question was repeated regarding the press, radio, websites, and online social networks. The answers were coded for each variable as 1 (too negatively or too positively) or 2 (objectively). The reason for assigning negative and positive perceptions toward the media to a single group is because such responses signify

directional media bias (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006) and its evaluation as non-objective. However, the current study aims to understand the impact of the objective perceptions of media on the relationship between news consumption and European identity. Therefore, it makes sense to assign the directional bias of media and its objective perceptions in two different groups. Here the author again categorized the five media variables into two—traditional and online—groups. The three media variables (television, radio, and press) referring to traditional media were highly correlated (between $r = .61$ and $r = .67$), and the scale reliability was also good ($\text{Alpha} = .83$); consequently, the author used these items for index building. Similarly, the online media variables (websites and online social networks) were also highly correlated ($r = .65$) therefore, they were used to measure objective perceptions toward online media.

Finally, the individual variables of trust and objective perceptions for both traditional and online media were computed, resulting in two variables signifying media credibility assessment for traditional ($M = 1.60$; $SD = 0.35$) and online ($M = 1.44$; $SD = 0.37$) media, which were used as moderators in the respective models.

Political predispositions: To determine the political predispositions of the respondents towards the EU, the author used the following question: “What does the EU mean to you personally?” The respondents could choose multiple answers from a number of different options, including (a) peace, (b) economic prosperity, (c) democracy, (d) social protection, (e) freedom to travel, study, and work anywhere in the EU, (f) cultural diversity, (g) stronger say in the world, (h) Euro, (i) unemployment, (j) bureaucracy, (k) waste of money, (l) loss of our cultural identity, (m) more crime, (n) not enough control at external borders, (o) other, and (p) don’t know. In order to classify the predisposition as either positive or negative, the author conducted an exploratory factor analysis to ensure that the above items indeed belonged to either group. The result of the factor analysis (Table 6.3) indicated that cultural diversity, democracy, peace, travel/study abroad, stronger say in the world, and economic prosperity

loaded together; meanwhile, items such as more crime, waste of money, not enough frontier control, loss of cultural identity, bureaucracy, and unemployment belong together. Moreover, the findings suggested that Euro and social protection should not be included as relevant indicators of predisposition, and thus the author removed both from the analysis. In the light of the factor analysis, the author computed the items into positive and negative groups and then calculated the difference between the two groups, which produced a single variable ($M = 0.68$; $SD = 2.10$) with value ranging from -6 to 6. Finally, to examine the direct and moderating effects of media on European identity among a group of people with either positive or negative predispositions, the author transformed the variable into a dichotomous variable ($M = 0.34$; $SD = 0.94$), with the values from -6 to -1 showing negative perceptions (-1) towards the EU and values from 1 to 6 representing positive predispositions (1).

6.3.2 Control variables

Past research on the topic has highlighted different factors—besides standard demographics—that influence EU-related attitudes. Moreover, from a methodological viewpoint, Conti and Memoli argued for the need to add strong control variables in addition to demographics in the analyses to increase the robustness of results. Accordingly, in addition to controlling for demographic variables (gender, age, and social class), the current study also utilized four different variables—political knowledge, discussion, current evaluation, and future expectations of European economy—deemed to be significant in the literature. A number of studies have shown that the frequency of political discussion (Mourao et al., 2015; Scheufele, 2002; Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker, & Zúñiga, 2017) and political knowledge (Cerniglia & Pagani, 2010; Marquart, Goldberg, van Elsas, Brosius, & de Vreese, 2018) are important factors in determining attitudes, particularly towards the EU. Similarly, the two variables, which refer to the current/future assessment of the European economy, are also considered significant in the

literature (Conti & Memoli, 2016; McLaren, 2006). Consequently, the author also controlled these variables in the present empirical analysis.

Demographics: There were 28055 respondents. Their average age was 48.40 years, and about 52% were women ($N = 14514$; 51.7%). To measure social class, the participants were asked to rate themselves from 1 (the lowest level in society) to 5 (the highest level). The mean value for social class excluding missing values was 2.39 ($N = 26734$; $SD = 0.98$).

Political knowledge and discussion: To evaluate their political knowledge, the participants were asked three true-or-false questions about the number of EU members, whether the citizens of each member state directly elect the members of the European Parliament, and whether Switzerland is a member of the EU. The summed values of political knowledge were calculated and divided using a three-point scale (values ranging from 1 to 3), including *low* ($N = 11947$; 42.6.1%), *average* ($N = 11222$; 40%), and *high* ($N = 4886$; 17.4%). The mean score computed for the new variable was 1.74 ($SD = 0.732$). The participants were also asked how often they were involved in political discussions with their friends and relatives. The choices were *frequently* ($N = 4046$; 14.5%), *occasionally* ($N = 14580$; 52.1%), and *never* ($N = 9338$; 33.3%). The author recoded this variable, with values ranging from 1 (never) to 3 (frequently), and the average score of the participants' involvement in the political discussion was 1.81 ($SD = 0.665$).

Current/future assessment of the European economy: In the Eurobarometer, the participants were asked to evaluate the current situation of the European economy. In response to the question, they had to choose *very bad* ($N = 1856$, 7.6%), *rather bad* ($N = 9098$; 37.4%), *rather good* ($N = 12329$; 50.7%), *very good* ($N = 1039$; 4.3%), or *don't know* ($N = 3733$; 13.3%). The author removed the *don't know* responses and ordered the variable according to four values, where 1 denoted *very bad* and 4 indicated *very good*. The mean score of the respondents' assessment of the European economy was 2.51 ($SD = 0.698$). To measure their

future expectations of the European economy, the interviewees were asked, “What are your expectations for the next twelve months when it comes to the economic situation in the EU?” The choices were *better* ($N = 6155$; 24.7%), *worse* ($N = 5671$; 22.8%), *same* ($N = 13064$; 52.5%), and *don't know* ($N = 3165$; 11.3%). The author then removed the *don't know* responses and reordered the variable according to three values, where 1 indicated *worse* and 3 signified *better*. The average score of this variable was 2.01 ($SD = 0.689$).

6.3.3 Data analysis

The data analysis in the present paper involved examining the impact of news consumption from traditional and online media on European identity (direct differential effect), including the ability of credibility perceptions of media to moderate this association (interaction effect), and finally evaluating how the direct and moderating effects vary for people with specific political predispositions (reinforcement effect). Accordingly, the researcher tested his conceptualized relationships and moderation with the assistance of SPSS.

In the present study, the use of SPSS for data analysis produced two sets of results—one for traditional and another for online media. Each set of results reflects estimates of the proposed relationships between media variables and European identity, including covariates, first for the whole sample with/out interaction term, and then for people with positive and negative predispositions. Thus, in total, the results consist of eight different models. As it is a normal practice in scholarship to center the input variables to improve the interpretability of the regression coefficients, the author mean-centered the variables before estimating their relationships using multiple linear regression (Field, 2018; Aiken & West, 1991). Finally, it is worth mentioning that each interaction model was bootstrapped using 5000 samples to estimate the 95% confidence intervals for the moderation effects of media credibility between news consumption and European identity.

6.4. Results

6.4.1 Traditional media and European identity

Table 6.1 shows the results relating to the proposed hypotheses and research questions, explaining the relationship between traditional media and European identity. Accordingly, hypothesis 1 proposed a positive impact of traditional media preference for news consumption on European identity. As shown in Table 6.1 (Model 1), choosing traditional media for political news consumption was significantly and positively associated with people's sense of European identity ($b = .18, p < .000$).

RQ1a inquired about the impact of subjective credibility assessment of traditional media on European identity. The results in Table 6.1 show that the credibility perception of media in comparison to the preference of media appears to be an influential factor in explaining European identity. Further, its ability to predict European identity positively and significantly was consistent across all models.

Besides the direct effects of subjective credibility assessment of traditional media, RQ2a asked about its role as a moderator between the preference of traditional media and European identity. The results show it did not exhibit an interaction effect in any of the models presented in Table 6.1. Simultaneously, this result also disproves H3a, which proposed that individual political predispositions reinforce both the direct and moderating effects of these variables on European identity. In contrast to that assumption, the result reveals that the direct effects of independent variables do not align with predispositions. Instead, the effects remain positive and are even strengthened among people with negative predispositions. Finally, the association of the control variables across all models was in line with the previous research on the subject. According to the literature, people who belong to a higher social class tend to have a higher level of European identity (Sojka, 2015). Similarly, those who have high political knowledge about the EU and frequently engage in political discussion tend to have a higher

European identity. Moreover, people who believe that the European economy is performing well and expect it do so also tend to have a higher sense of European identity (Conti & Memoli, 2016).

Table 6.1: Regression analysis predicting preference of traditional media on European identity

	Model 1 (Without interaction)	Model 2 (with interaction)	Model 3 (Positive predispositions)	Model 4 (Negative Predispositions)
Constant	2.73 (.02)***	2.73 (.02)***	3.03 (.02)***	2.27 (.03)***
Gender (male = 1)	.03 (.01)**	.03 (.01)**	-.01 (.01)	.09 (.02)***
Age	-.07 (.00)***	-.07 (.01)***	-.01 (.01)*	.06 (.01)***
Social class	.09 (.00)***	.09 (.01)***	.06 (.01)***	.10 (.01)***
Political discussion	.13 (.01)***	.13 (.01)***	.18 (.01)***	.03 (.01)*
Political knowledge	.07 (.01)***	.07 (.01)***	.05 (.01)***	.07 (.01)***
Situation of current European economy	.26 (.01)***	.25 (.01)***	.15 (.01)***	.21 (.01)***
Expectation for European economy	.15 (.01)***	.16 (.01)***	.10 (.01)***	.11 (.01)***
Media preference traditional media	.18 (.02)***	.18 (.02)***	.08 (.02)**	.19 (.04)***
Media credibility perception traditional media	.32 (.01)***	.32 (.01)***	.13 (.02)***	.30 (.03)***
Media preference X credibility perception	-	.01 (.05)	-.02 (.06)	-.08 (.10)
R^2	.20	.20	.10	.13
Weighted N	21800	21800	12205	6007

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; **** $p < .10$. Cell entries are unstandardized beta coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. DV: European identity

6.4.2 Online media and European identity

In H2, the author proposed that the preference of consuming political news through online media makes people more cynical towards the EU, which negatively impacts their sense of European identity. However, the results presented in Table 6.2 (Model 1) indicates that the opposite is true because the use of online media for political news consumption positively affected European identity ($b = .05, p < .001$). However, this positive relationship between the two variables was not consistent across all models, as it diminished when people were negatively predisposed towards the EU ($b = .03, p > .05$).

Table 6.2: Regression analysis predicting preference of online media on European identity

	Model 1 (Without interaction)	Model 2 (with interaction)	Model 3 (Positive predispositions)	Model 4 (Negative Predispositions)
Constant	2.72 (.02)***	2.72 (.01)***	3.03 (.05)***	2.27 (.07)***
Gender (male = 1)	.04 (.01)***	.04 (.01)***	.00 (.01)	.09 (.02)***
Age	-.03 (.01)***	-.03 (.01)***	.01 (.01)*	-.02 (.01)*
Social class	.09 (.01)***	.09 (.01)***	.05 (.01)***	.09 (.01)***
Political discussion	.14 (.01)***	.14 (.01)***	.17 (.01)***	.03 (.02)
Political knowledge	.07 (.01)***	.07 (.01)***	.05 (.01)***	.08 (.01)***
Situation of current European economy	.29 (.01)***	.29 (.01)***	.15 (.01)***	.22 (.01)***
Expectation for European economy	.16 (.01)***	.16 (.01)***	.09 (.01)***	.13 (.01)***
Media preference online media	.05 (.02)**	.06 (.02)***	.02 (.02)	.10 (.03)**
Media credibility perception online media	.17 (.01)***	.17 (.01)***	.10 (.02)***	.26 (.03)***
Media preference X credibility perception	-	-.08 (.04)*	.05 (.05)	-.20 (.09)**
R ²	.18	.18	.09	.11
Weighted N	20150	20150	11138	5465

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; **** $p < .10$. Cell entries are unstandardized beta coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. DV: European identity

In addition to the supposed effect of online news usage, RQ1b was concerned with the influence of media credibility perceptions on European identity. Accordingly, the results (Table 6.2) indicate that the credibility perception of online media had a positive and significant relation with European identity across all models. Moreover, the results also suggest that the subjective assessment of online media credibility tended to predict European identity better than selecting online media for news consumption. This kind of relationship between credibility perception and European identity was consistent irrespective of the type of media. However, comparing the results in both tables shows that, for European identity, credibility perceptions of the traditional media were more consequential than those of online media, and this trend was consistent across all models. As for the interaction effects (RQ2b), the results (Table 6.2 – Model 2) show that the perception of online media credibility significantly and negatively moderated the relationship between the preference of online media and people's sense of European identity ($b = -.15, p < .000$). The presence of a significant interaction indicates that the effect of one independent variable on the dependent variable is different at different values of the other independent variable (Conti & Memoli, 2016). Thus, in this case, it implies that European identity not only depends on a citizen's preference of online media for political news consumption but also on whether or not the citizen evaluates the online media to be trustworthy and objective.

In H3b, the author proposed that political predispositions reinforce the direct and moderating effects of online media on European identity. The result (Table 6.2 – Model 3) in this regard shows that positive predispositions neither reinforced the direct effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable nor generated any interaction effects. However, negative predispositions diminished the direct effect of online news consumption while reinforcing the direct impact of credibility perception and its interplay with online news preference on European identity.

6.5 Discussion

The present study investigated (a) how the preference of traditional or online media for news consumption along with the perception of its credibility impact and interact with people's sense of European identity (b) and whether this influence becomes more pronounced when people hold distinctive predispositions toward the EU. The previous literature regarding the effects of media suggest that news related to European politics matters in general and is related to public attitudes toward the EU. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no studies have explored the direct effects of traditional and online news preference as well as its credibility and their interplay on European identity among differently predisposed people. The current study fills this gap, and in doing so, it not only identifies the direct effects of news media selection on European identity but also examines the contingency of these effects on the perception of media credibility and political predispositions.

Accordingly, the results in the previous section revealed that the preference of both traditional and online media for political news consumption is directly and positively associated with European identity. Hence, this study is in line with past research showing that the consumption of traditional media news makes people feel attached to the EU, and this is because it tends to cover the EU in a positive manner, thus leading to a positive effect (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016; Staehelin, 2016).

With regard to online media, the findings add to the growing body of literature (e.g., Mourao, et al., 2015) that differs from earlier studies, according to which the use of online media for political information adds to Euroscepticism (Conti & Memoli, 2016; de Wilde et al., 2013). One reason for this difference is that such studies have investigated the impact of online media use on attitudes associated with functional aspects of the EU (also called specific support attitudes) (Easton, 1975), such as support for its policies and evaluation of its institutions, and these are relatively easy to change. Identity in general—and European identity in particular—

is a quite stable and resilient feeling that acts as a buffer against Euroscepticism (Weßels, 2007). It is this resilience that mere preferring online media for news consumption does not lead to negative effect on European identity. Another reason for this positive effect can be explained based on the intermedia agenda-setting literature, according to which traditional and online media entities are “homogenous” and have a symbiotic relationship (Harder, Sevenans, & Van Aelst, 2017, p. 276; Vonbun, Königslöw, & Schoenbach, 2015). This implies that if the traditional media chooses to cover the EU positively, it is likely that similar content will permeate the Internet, which consequently influences the European identity of the recipient positively. Recent studies have shown that the traditional media in most member states (with the exception of the British media) presents the EU positively (Bayley & Williams, 2012; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016). Following intermedia agenda-setting logic, this means that such coverage infuses into online media, and as a result both forms of media have similar effects on European identity.

In addition to news media preference, the present study found that evaluating media as credible is an important determinant of European identity. This falls in line with the previous findings emphasizing the positive role of media credibility on political attitudes (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Ladd, 2011). However, despite being significantly related to European identity, credibility perception in the case of traditional media does not moderate the relationship between the media preference for news consumption and European identity, suggesting independent effects of both predictors. Conversely, news consumption from online media and subjective assessment of its credibility negatively but significantly interact with European identity. This means that the strength and direction of the relationship between media selection and European identity are affected by subjective credibility perceptions of online media. The study found such interaction effects only when the respondents were either not at all predisposed or only negatively predisposed. To further probe these moderations and point out

how different levels of credibility perceptions affect the relationship between news and European identity, the author has conducted a simple slope analysis.

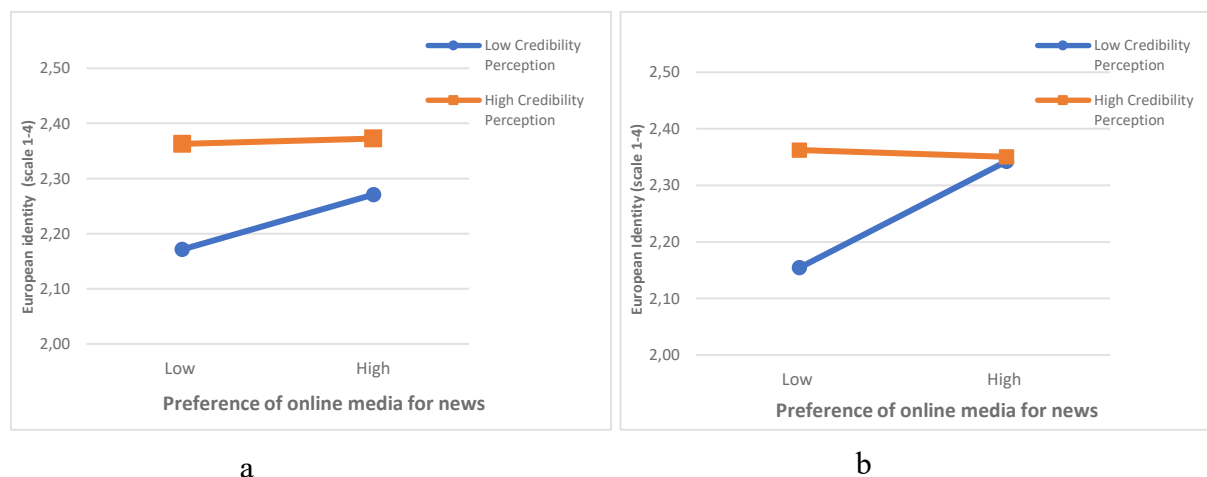


Figure 6.2 Simple slope analysis

Note: (a) Interaction between online media preference for news consumption and its credibility assessment on European identity: (b) Interaction between online media preference for news consumption and its credibility assessment on European identity among people with negative predispositions towards the EU: The y-axis denotes the European identity scale with values from 1 (low) to 4 (high).

Examination of the interaction plot (Figure 6.2a) indicates that there was no significant relationship between the preference of online media for news consumption and European identity for those who tended to evaluate the credibility of online media as high. However, for those who considered the credibility of online media low, European identity increased as they consumed news from online media. As for the reinforcement effect, the change in the direction of the slopes and values on y-axis (see Figure 6.2b) signifies the ability of negative predispositions to reinforce the interaction effects, which consequently weakens European identity. The plot also indicates this dampening effect (Gaskin, 2018). According to this effect, as the preference of online media increases among those who perceive media as highly credible, their sense of European identity decreases. Conversely, for those who perceive online media as less credible, their European identity increases as their reliance on online media for

political news consumption increases. Hence, this result endorses previous findings showing that pre-existing attitudes play a role in driving the effects of media (de Vreese & Kandyla, 2009; Ceron & Memoli, 2015), and they partially confirm that at least negative predispositions are relevant with regard to the effects of media on European identity.

The study has some limitations and caveats that should be considered in the interpretation of the results. First, the present analysis based on the Eurobarometer survey focuses only on 28 EU-member countries. Hence, the results are only generalizable and applicable to that extent. Moreover, I have examined all member states to increase the generalizability of the results, but there is a possibility that a specific country or group of countries might produce a different set of results. Second, although the Eurobarometer has to an extensive list of different types of news sources, the respondents were only asked to identify whether they had used each source for political news rather than how much they had used each source. Knowing the frequency of their media use, particularly for political news, might have produced stronger results. Third, although the results have explicitly shown that news consumption from different media sources has different effects on European identity, the models cannot establish the causal direction and explain why such differences occur in the highlighted relationships. Therefore, future studies on the topic should take the content of political news from distinctive types of media into consideration.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the existing literature in multiple ways. It shows that news consumption from different media is important to European identity, even though the direct effects are moderate in size. Besides news, the credibility of media is also an important factor in explaining people's sense of European identity. Since both are independently related to European identity, the study goes a step further to examine their interaction effect. In doing so, it reveals that for online media, the interaction is significant, and hence the effect of news on European identity depends on whether or not people perceive online

media as credible. Conversely, in the case of traditional media users, credibility perceptions do not moderate the effect of news on identity. Finally, the study demonstrates that distinctive pre-existing attitudes play an important role in reinforcing different media effects.

6.6 Annex

Table 6.3: Rotated component matrix for 14 EU dispositional items based on (EB 88.3)

	Components	
	Positive Predispositions	Negative Predispositions
EU Meaning: Cultural Diversity	0.588	
EU Meaning: Democracy	0.570	
EU Meaning: Peace	0.545	
EU Meaning: Travel/Study/Work Abroad	0.540	
EU Meaning: Stronger say in the world	0.534	
EU Meaning: Economic prosperity	0.509	
EU Meaning: Euro	0.386	
EU Meaning: Social protection	0.364	
EU Meaning: More crime		0.665
EU Meaning: Waste of money		0.659
EU Meaning: Not enough frontier control		0.620
EU Meaning: Loss of cultural identity		0.525
EU Meaning: Bureaucracy		0.500
EU Meaning: Unemployment		0.497
Initial eigenvalue	2.35	1.88
Percentage explained variance	16.81	13.47
Cumulative percentage	16.81	30.28

7. Conclusions

Call me naive if you must, but when I started this project back in March 2013, I could not have imagined that the organization that had won the Nobel Peace Prize just six months ago for maintaining peace and unity in the continent for over sixty years (The Nobel Peace Prize for 2012, 2012) would begin to break within the next three years. Today, it is hardly disputed that despite the unequaled history of success in bringing peace and economic prosperity, the EU has recently suffered from eroding public support in many member states, culminating in the decision of the UK to leave the EU (Ciaglia, Fuest, & Heinemann, 2018). It has been argued that this decision was driven—among other factors—by the media due to its “acrimonious and divisive” coverage of the Brexit, which eventually convinced most British people to decide in the favor of leaving the EU (Moore & Ramsay, 2017, p. 163). In a way, this shows the power of the media in shaping and affecting public political attitudes. Against this background, this study explored the concept of European identity, which is of fundamental importance for European integration and public support for the EU from the perspective of political communication. In essence, I have attempted to examine the relationship between media and people’s sense of European identity to answer an overarching and previously under-explored research question: How does media use affect European identity?

Due to the empirical nature of this study, my focus primarily remained on understanding either just the effects of media use or both the use and people’s subjective evaluation of its content on European identity rather than on providing theoretical refinements to the concept itself. Therefore, based on the theoretical framework of SIT and its application in previous studies, I have contended that the European identity is a concept best understood

through its cognitive and affective dimensions. The affective dimension refers to one's emotional self-assignment to a collective and is therefore denoted as *identification with Europe/EU*. Meanwhile, cognitive dimension refers to one's self-perception as a part of the European community, which thus implies *identification as European*. As for the media, I have operationalized various effects of media prescribed in the respective literature in different settings, and I found that each of them influences people's sense of European identity under certain contextual conditions.

In this conclusion, I intend to briefly reiterate the main findings, the methods used, and the value these results add to the scholarship. Finally, based on my findings discussed in different chapters, I suggest some directions for future research and highlight the limitations in my work.

7.1 Main findings

In my first study (Chapter 3), I began with the argument that the EU as a supranational organization has attempted, through multiple policy programs over the course of its existence, to create unity, harmony, and a sense of togetherness while recognizing the diversity of its member states. Therefore, while operating at a macro-societal level, the EU is aptly situated to be an “identity builder” institution (Laffan, 2004, p. 78). However, in order for it to succeed it requires public support to legitimate and further the EU integration process, which will eventually promote the sense of togetherness and European identity (Fuchs, 2011; Eder, 2009; McLaren, 2006). But, how far has it succeeded in increasing people's sense of European identity? With this question in my mind, I set out to examine the trend and variation in the level of European identity between 2004 and 2017 at the macro level by classifying all EU-member states based on their geographic cardinals—East, West, North, and South. Doing this allowed me to explore public opinion at the regional level and provided a holistic view to better understand how people evaluate the EU and assign themselves to the European community.

The descriptive analyses in that study revealed that regions vary in their assessment of the EU. Despite the variations, all regions except the Northern member states mostly shared positive attitudes toward the EU. However, with regard to the affective dimension of European identity, which is denoted as *identification with the EU*, the results showed a significant decline across all regions in the percentage of people who feel attached to the EU after 2009. While, it was not the scope of this study, other investigations (e.g., Schäfer & Weber, 2014) and my own subsequent work (Chapter 5 of this thesis) suggest that the Eurozone Financial crisis may have triggered this decline. Moreover, the close observation of results while compiling different studies into a single dissertation pointed similar trend of development in different public opinion indicators, which allowed me to test if these indicators are related to each other. Thus, upon conducting a factor analysis of individual Eurobarometer surveys, I found that all six public opinion indicators are essentially related and belong to single construct. This allows me to propose the use of multiple indicators in operationalizing European identity – something which I could not have done during my individual empirical analyses.

In Chapter 4, I explored whether more exposure to news concerning the EU causes people to have a higher European identity and whether this relationship is modified by the perception of media hostility. The results supported my contention that frequent contact with predominantly neutral information provokes mere-exposure effects, which promote the feeling of European identity. With regard to the moderation effects of hostile media perceptions, the results also supported the theoretical assumptions and confirmed that the mere-exposure effect is weaker in persons who perceive the media as hostile than in those who perceive the media as not hostile. At the same time, the findings also showed that the mere-exposure effect is strongest in non-partisan persons who perceive the media as objective. In the quest to find more information regarding the relationship between the mere-exposure effect and European identity at varying levels of hostile media perception, I found countries in which the citizens had a

higher European identity. In these countries, the mere-exposure effect was always relatively high, regardless of whether or not the citizens perceived the media as hostile. However, this was not the case in countries where citizens felt less attached to the EU. In those countries, the mere-exposure effect was observed only among individuals without hostile media perceptions.

Accordingly, the findings in Chapter 4 highlighted that media exposure positively affects European identity, but this effect is dependent on the perception of the media. Therefore, to foster European identity, it is not enough that the citizens are simply consumers of news—it is even more important that they perceive the media to be neutral.

In my next empirical analysis (Chapter 5), I investigated whether the use of television to get information about the EU makes people feel less attached (*malaise effect*) to or adds (*mobilization effect*) to their European identity. In this study, I explored the effect of television use on the European identity in countries that were most and least affected by the Eurozone financial crisis. My analyses did not reveal any *malaise effects* of television use on European identity. However, the findings confirmed mobilization effects of media use for political information. In addition, the results also confirmed the interdependence between citizen's evaluation of their national and European economies, their political support based on normative indicators (trust in the EU and satisfaction with democracy), and European identity. This further implies that people who feel attached to the EU do not just have a cost and benefit relation with it; in addition, they expect it to be democratic and trustworthy (Schäfer & Weber 2014).

While acknowledging the growing use and importance of online media for political attitudes, for my final study in the project, I set out to explore how the use of online news consumption compared to traditional news consumption affects people's sense of European identity. In doing so, I also investigated whether those effects are moderated by how credible people perceive the media to be and if their predispositions toward the EU have an influence

in explaining the different media effects. The results of this study showed that consuming news either from traditional or online media positively affects European identity. Additionally, the credibility perception of both media sources is a better predictor of European identity, but moderation only occurs in the case of online media. Furthermore, the results revealed the asymmetric impact of political predispositions (Baccini, Sudulich, & Wall, 2016). This implies that the direct and moderating effects of news consumption and media credibility on European identity among positively predisposed people tend to be weak, whereas the effects are reinforced when people negatively evaluate the EU, and this trend is consistent for both types of media.

People's sense of European identity was the central concept in this dissertation. I primarily wanted to understand if all the effort that has gone into the process of European integration has made people feel more attached to the EU, and if so, what role does media use and subjective perception of its content play in this process. Additionally, I was motivated to explore the notion of European identity exclusively in light of media and communication science. To date, most studies have employed media use as an explanatory variable, while a few scholars have investigated its framing, agenda-setting, and priming effects on European identity. However, communication science is not limited to these effects. Thus, I wanted to extend the debate with regard to the operationalization of different effects of media use on European identity and compare the variability of these effects between traditional and online media. This differentiated and multi-dimensional focus on European identity made this dissertation unique and extended what we know about the relationship between media and European identity in various ways.

First, I employed a macro-level approach to assess different attitudes towards the EU, including European identity, between 2004 and 2017, which allowed me to demonstrate the trend and development of these indicators over a long period of time and at a regional level.

This provided insights regarding which regions are more prone to dissociate from the EU and therefore require more efforts to instill a sense of collective identity. Moreover, this work facilitated me in the later stage of this project in showing that different public opinion indicators including European identity are related to each other, which suggests that collective European identity is diverse construct and can be measured through various indicators. Second, along with my co-authors, I operationalized mere-exposure and hostile media effects for the first time and examined their interplay with the European identity, thus extending the literature beyond the commonly studied effects.

Third, while many studies have explored the impact of the Eurozone financial crisis on political attitudes (e.g., Hobolt & Wratil, 2015), I studied its influence in conjunction with the effects of media use while arguing that news media are the primary sources of information about socio-political issues (Beck, Dalton, Greene, & Huckfeldt, 2002) and are bound to affect its consumers. In doing so, I illustrated that the use of media even during a crisis, when the likelihood of negative news is abundant, does not make people less attached to the EU. Fourth, the results of my study demonstrated that besides traditional media, news consumption from online media also fosters European identity. Additionally, for Europeans to feel a sense of collective identity, it is crucial that they perceive the source of news as credible. This highlights the need for credible and unbiased news coverage of the EU to strengthen European identity among citizens.

Besides the effect of media on European identity, this work also confirms past research on the topic according to which young people, who have more knowledge about the EU, belong to higher social class, and frequently engage in political discussion tend to have a higher sense of European identity. Here it is imperative to mention that, I could have drawn on the insights obtained in the explorative data analysis conducted in chapter 3 and used certain years – during the Eurozone financial crisis, when public opinion towards the EU was rather low – to examine

the particularities of respective time frame on the relationship between media use and European identity. However, due to unavailability of suitable indicators (especially media use variables) in a desired survey restrained me to further explore the implication of contextual factors generally on public attitudes towards the EU and specifically on European identity.

7.2 Extending conceptualization of European identity

In this sub-section, I would like to build on all the findings obtained through various studies and offer an integrated model of European identity to extend its conceptual and multidimensional understanding. Moreover, the model also takes the relationship between media use and subjective evaluation of its content into consideration. In different empirical analyses presented in this dissertation, I have always operationalized European identity through its cognitive and/or affective dimensions. However, looking at the results presented in different studies, one can note the association between these dimensions and other European political attitudes (e.g., image of the EU (in chapter 3), the performance of the EU (in chapter 4), the evaluation of national and European economy (in chapter 5)). This prompts me to assume that perhaps the concept of European identity is not exclusive only to one's cognitive and affective attachment to a collective and may very well be extended.

To test this assumption, I looked into various Eurobarometer surveys to find all indicators of different political attitudes, including European identity used in the different empirical studies. Consequently, I found two standard Eurobarometer surveys one released in 2013 (80.1) and other in 2017 (88.3) that contained most of the questions required to test my assumption. Based on the data from each survey, I then conducted factor analyses, and its results are presented in the following table:

Table 7.1: Rotated component matrix of European political attitudes

Scale Items	2013		2017	
	1	2	1	2
Image of the EU	.73		.77	
Feeling attach to the EU	.81		.76	
Personal meaning of the EU	.70		.72	
Feel citizen of the EU	.78		.71	
Satisfy with democracy in the EU	.55		.67	
Trust in the EU	.60		.65	
Evaluation of National economy		.84		.85
Evaluation of European economy		.83		.77
Initial eigenvalue	3.60	1.20	3.70	1.04
Percentage of variance	44.82	14.95	46.24	13.06
Cumulative percentage	44.82	59.77	46.24	59.31

Results presented in Table 7.1 classify different European political attitudes in two groups, and such categorization remains consistent across both surveys. Furthermore, the factor analysis allows me to draw two conclusions. First is the confirmation that the notion of European identity is not exclusive only to cognitive and affective dimensions. The loading of these dimensions along with other European political attitudes on a single component indicates that European identity is a multi-dimensional concept and therefore should not be limited only to one's affective feeling or cognitive assignment to the European collective. Secondly, the results delineate the economic and psychological/political component of European identity. Hence, one can infer that for people to develop a sense of collective European identity, they need to perceive their country's membership in the EU as beneficial, and they must also positively evaluate it against different post-materialist measures (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011).

In light of these results, I am inclined to test if the relationship between media variables used in previous analyses (traditional and online media use/selection and subjective evaluation of its content) would vary when I change the operationalization of European identity by using the items classified in two components obtained as a result of factor analysis. The following figure illustrates the conceptual extension of European identity and its relationship with both traditional and online media variables.

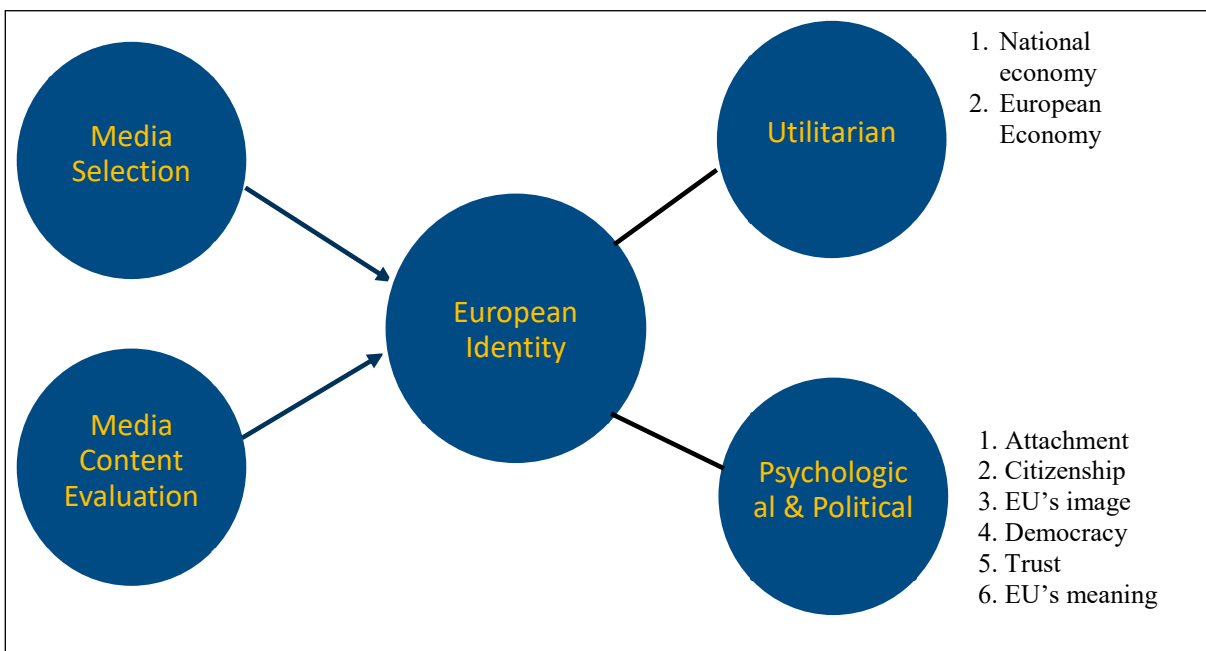


Figure 7.1 Conceptual extension of European identity and association with media

To empirically examine the variations in the relationship between media variables and extended conceptual version(s) of European identity, I performed multiple linear regression on the data obtained from the Eurobarometer survey of 2017 (88.3). As the dataset to test this conjecture is same as in the chapter 6, therefore, I have followed the similar operationalizations of different independent and control variables. Subsequently, to test how traditional and online media selection/use for consuming news regarding the EU political affairs and perception of its content effect European identity, I conducted three different analyses. In the first analysis (Model 1), European identity is operationalized through its utilitarian indicators, in Model 2

psychological and political indicators are used to measure dependent variable, whereas, in the last model, I computed all indicators based on their mean and obtained a collective measure of European identity. In addition to independent traditional and online media variables, I used same control variables that have been used in previous analyses. The results of these analyses are presented in the following table:

Table 7.2: Multiple linear regression

Scale Items	Model 1 Utilitarian	Model 2 Psychological/ political	Model 3 Combined
N	16221	16377	16377
R ²	.08	.13	.15
Traditional media selection	.07***	.09***	.10***
Online media selection	.00 ^{n.s}	.08***	.07***
Traditional media evaluation (Partisan to objective)	.17***	.25***	.26***
Online media evaluation (Partisan to objective)	-.04***	-.01 ^{n.s}	-.01
Political discussion frequency (Low to high)	.08***	.07***	.08***
Knowledge about the EU (Low to high)	.07***	.11***	.11***
Social class (Low to high)	.17***	.12***	.15***
Age (1=Man, 2=Woman)	-.02**	-.12***	-.11***

Note. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; ****p<.10. Cell entries are unstandardized beta coefficients

The foremost results indicate there is positive association between using traditional media and European identity, and the strength of this relationship does not change dramatically across three models. With regards to online media, the results indicate that there is no relationship between use of online media and European identity when it is operationalized through utilitarian indicators, but there is positive significant association between the two when European identity is measured through psychological-political indicators. As for the other media variable regarding subjective evaluation of its content, the results show: The more

people perceive the content is objective the higher is their European identity, irrespective of how it is operationalized. On the other hand, the results show: The more people perceive online media as objective, the lower is their European identity, but only when it is operationalized through utilitarian indicators. Besides, the relationship between individual control variables and European identity does not vary with its operationalization. In essence, the results indicate slight variations in terms of relational strength when we move across models, whereas, the changes are more pronounced when we compare traditional and online media variables. Thus, we can infer that the relationship of media selection and subjective perception of its content with different operationalization models of European identity does not dramatically change, showing the reliability of various indicators employed to measure the dependent variable.

In the end, I like to reiterate that different studies and the extended conceptual model in this dissertation have shown that European identity is a dynamic and intricate concept that is linked with a range of political attitudes. Furthermore, as the explained variance increases using more indicators, scholars should not restrict its operationalization on limited measures.

Most important, the relationship between European identity and media use (particularly in case of traditional media) remains positive, suggesting that consuming media related to political affairs in the EU contributes towards building people's European identity, which essentially means that media usage leads to mere exposure effect. And despite the research that suggests the content of media on the EU remains more negative than positive and leads to negative effects, my findings contrast with this assertion and confirm the prevalence of mere exposure effect, which remains constant in all empirical analyses.

7.3 Limitations of this dissertation

This work has some limitations. The foremost shortcoming is its reliance on secondary data, which is usually restricted in terms of availability of suitable indicators to measure relevant constructs. This has forced many scholars, including myself, to use the same set of items in the

Eurobarometer series to re-operationalize the same constructs, such as political support, post-modern values, or various media effects, in different ways, therefore reinventing the wheel all too often (cf. Scharkow & Vogelgesang, 2010; Gabel, 1998; Schäfer & Weber, 2014; Mourao et al., 2015). Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the data hindered me throughout my work, making it difficult to provide a definitive account of the variations that occurred at an individual level at different points in time. The solution to this problem is using panel data in a longitudinal research design. Furthermore, despite showing that different media sources have different effects on European identity, my results cannot conclusively explain why such differences occur. Again, this limitation could be attributed to the available data because it does not offer any measures that can be used to examine the content of the messages, which prevents me from identifying any causality. Similarly, the questions that were relevant to the respective empirical analyses have been inconsistently available in the surveys. This limited the possibility to expand the analyses over time, with a consistent interval, and to produce validated results that could be generalized beyond the short time series.

Beyond the limitations associated with the data, Bruter (2008, p. 281) criticized conceptualizing European identity on the basis of its affective dimension, arguing that attachment means different things to different people and that identity is not “spontaneously conceived in analytical terms” but rather “expressed.” Therefore, he recommended using questions with labeled scales as opposed to pure self-placement to compare individuals. I partly support his idea to the extent of using a labeled scale to make the measurement of European identity more robust. Finally, it is important to put the results in the proper perspective. The media effects I found in different studies were significant but moderate at best. Despite the large number of cases in each survey, the models did not change dramatically when the media variables were added in the respective analyses. In a way, this falls in line with most media

effects studies, which do not find large effect sizes and usually report moderate but significant results (cf. Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

In spite of the aforementioned limitations, I am confident that this dissertation has added value to the research field. In these challenging times, when the media is blamed for disintegrating societies and increasing partisanship, this study, within its limited capacity, demonstrated that using media for news consumption makes people feel a sense of belonging to a collective, thus integrating them. Moreover, I believe that future research can further optimize the presented analytical perspective by taking advantage of the theoretical and methodological progress made in this project.

7.4 Directions for future research

In the last ten years, the EU has confronted some serious challenges, including the Eurozone financial crisis, Brexit, the refugee crisis, and the rise of populism. Although all these issues are being tackled head on, the fact remains that they have revealed the soft underbelly of the European integration process—the growing erosion of public support. In such a challenging time, the sense of identity, of belonging together, provides a buffer that can prevent a polity from losing all of its support. This makes European identity a very timely and relevant topic to explore, particularly from the communication science perspective. Thus, the following presents some suggestions for future researchers to add further to the debate.

Measuring European identity: Generally, scholars in the field do not agree on a single definition of European identity, but they do accept that it is a complex topic. Therefore, it is logical to adopt more rigorous and innovative methods for its measurement. Since I was limited by the nature of the available data, I adopted the generally used indicators to measure the concept. However, recently I came across an innovative idea introduced by Luhmann (2015) during a conference regarding the use of a mobile app to measure European identity. According to the prototype, she proposed a multi-step identity measurement process, which included

responding to psychological questions, expressing what the relationship between Europeans in the EU should be, and watching a short video on a historic European integration event while the app measures the viewer's facial responses. However, I have not seen any published results from this effort, and thus I am not sure whether it was successful. Nevertheless, the thinking was novel and could be further optimized.

Media content and use: Although many studies that investigate the impact of media on different EU-related attitudes take the content into consideration, this is still a rarity in investigations related to European identity. Therefore, future studies should opt for a more integrated approach that includes the media content in the survey, as this will help establish the causality of the underlying media effects. Similarly, reliance on self-reported media use and subjective evaluation of content may satisfy some research questions, but it is not ideally suited to ensuring the methodological and theoretical robustness of the results. Moreover, future studies should consider obtaining information not only about whether the respondents use media for political news but also how frequently they use it for news consumption.

Differential media: Furthermore, Conti and Memoli (2016) observed that there is a dearth of empirical investigations that compare the effects of both online and traditional media on EU-related attitudes. This scarcity is even more stark in the case of European identity. Accordingly, future research should continue to consider the widespread use and emergence of online forums as key political communication platforms while attempting to examine their impact on political attitudes and behavior in comparison to traditional media.

Member states matter: The EU, despite being one supranational all-powerful polity, is still a collection of nations that differ from one another in several ways. In this dissertation, I could not study the existence of various effects in individual countries instead I always compared different groups of member states, but future studies should try to apply the findings of this work on separate countries.

7.5 In sum and substance

In this dissertation, we learned that the sense of European identity varies across different regions and is dynamic over time. It is a resilient dimension of European's political attitudes that takes time to inculcate and does not easily fade in the face of a crisis. Media serves as the main informant of European political matters, and in this role, it fosters European identity. This positive effect of media is irrespective of its type. Moreover, while the consumption of news is important, the perception of its objectivity is even more significant, as seen by its stronger positive relationship with the sense of European identity. In conclusion, it is my hope that this investigation into a subject that, by its very nature, is complex, and difficult to assess, inspires other researchers to ratify, where appropriate, the trends and methods described in this thesis.

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